PANORAMIC STILL-LIFES: ART, PERCEPTION, AND BEING IN THE WORKS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

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ABSTRACT

This project is an interdisciplinary study of Virginia Woolf's artistic representation of perception in her writing and in particular in her early short story prose experiments, her posthumously published memoir, and three of her major novels. I use a phenomenological framework, drawing primarily from the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to identify Woolf's philosophical aesthetic, and to trace how she presents in her fiction an immersive and intersubjective form of realism through vivid descriptions of the object world. The first part of the project analyzes Woolf's stylistic aims within the context of Post-Impressionism, examining, through interpretive comparisons between visual art and literature, how her approaches and artistic sensibilities aligned with those of Bloomsbury Group members, most notably, the art critic Roger Fry and her sister, Vanessa Bell, a distinguished avant-garde painter. The second part of the study engages in close readings of three of Woolf's novels — *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Years* — to reveal how Woolf's understanding of time, perception, and embodiment prefigures and engages with early to mid-twentieth century phenomenological and materialist trends of thought in its articulation of the intervening spaces and interactions between humans and the object world.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Virginia Woolf

D 1-5	*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*
JR	*Jacob's Room*
L 1-6	*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*
"Modern"	"Modern Fiction"
MD	*Mrs. Dalloway*
"Being"	"On Being Ill"
RF	*Roger Fry: A Biography*
"Sketch"	"A Sketch of the Past"
TL	*To the Lighthouse*
TY	*The Years*
WS	*Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (1934 edition)

Works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty

"Eye"	"Eye and Mind"
PhP	*Phenomenology of Perception*
VI	*The Visible and the Invisible*
WP	*The World of Perception*

INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf's prose writing has been widely acknowledged for its vivid descriptions of lived space, which create a heightened sense of engagement with the material, object world while at the same time reveal the indeterminacies of the human experience. This sustained commitment to addressing the contradictions inherent in representing lived experience informs my close examination of three of Woolf's major novels – *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *The Years* (1937) – through which I trace a connective aesthetic philosophy as it reveals elements of Woolf's understanding of perception, time, and embodiment. I am interested principally in Woolf's artistic sensibility as a writer: how her engagement with the visual arts – especially the craft of painting – enabled her to render the interpenetrations of internal and external rhythms of thought and sense through vivid depictions of physical spaces and embodied memory. As she asserts in "Modern Fiction," the "mind receives a myriad impressions" which change from moment to moment; and that, if writers had the freedom to represent these sensations in the ways they "chose," then there "would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style" (150). My overarching aim is to suggest how Woolf develops a form of realism that blurs the boundaries between the implied and explicit markers of her represented worlds to create a more plastic and indefinable system of meanings. It is this determined exploration of artistic form that enabled her to explore through her fiction a range of aesthetic and philosophical questions and to create literary renderings of the world that, according to Kathleen Wall, "resemble verbal paintings" (303). Woolf depicts visual scenes that reveal the many ways her characters embody the world around them through their senses, and that simulate a sensorial realm for the reader. The experience of reading her prose can, in this sense, be compared to viewing a gallery of still-life paintings that are anything but static. What my approach to Woolf's work explores is rather a phenomenological mode of thought that incites a rumination on both the intervening and incongruous zones between the human consciousness and the world of objects.

Woolf's stance as a writer and approach to writing has always existed outside the bounds of conventional modes of realist prose writing, which is evidenced by her refusal to adopt the

representational strategies of H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy. As she claims in "Modern Fiction," such authors wrote novels with an "air of probability embalming the whole" (149). Her critiques of realist conventions in the novel have often prompted critics to believe that Woolf positions the domain of materiality and the world of interiority in opposition to one another. However, this sentiment, in its celebratory embrace of experimental writing as a break with the formulaic traditions of the past, has been complicated by a number of scholars. For instance, Derek Ryan writes that Woolf was neither "endorsing a transcendental spiritual life in opposition to an immanently embodied one" nor challenging writers to write about "the enclosed space of the mind" as if to free them from the tethers of representing the empirical world (1). She was presenting, rather, a mode of writing which acknowledges that "'life' is located in the everyday entanglement of mind and matter" (Ryan 1). Following this logic, I argue that Woolf was careful to avoid creating her own totalizing structure for comprehending reality: as she argues in "The Novels of Turgenev," the novelist should be able "observe facts impartially, yet [. . .] must also interpret them" (56). For Woolf, the driving impetus behind her novelistic art is her unfaltering commitment to describing the subjects of her world in relation to space, place, and materiality. Her descriptions are explicitly rendered, and they ground the reader in the idiosyncrasies of the perceiving characters of her fiction through its narrative styles, but they are also approximations of a much larger artistic vision. The guiding purpose of the vision is not to establish a doctrine nor a formula, but in part to document the act of experiencing the world through the senses; it is a recapitulation of the interpersonal and paradoxical process of creating meaning while living it. It is perhaps because of this tension that exists between the phenomenal and the transcendent that Woolf's efforts to articulate an orienting "philosophy" are often difficult or partial ("Sketch" 72). In a well-known passage in "A Sketch of the Past" she sums up her view of life as a pervading "idea" or "pattern" that is "hidden" behind a vast zone of unconscious daily habits: "the cotton wool" (72). Significantly, her desire to give form to the "shock" of existence, to "put the severed parts together" – "making a scene come right; making a character come together" – originates from the "pain" and "delights" of her physical and sensorial engagement with the world (72).

Woolf's commitment to representing in her writing both the material world and the varied modes of perception through which it is experienced has led me to draw from the philosophical writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). I engage in particular with his seminal work

Phenomenology of Perception (1945), as well as his essays that focus on the visual arts and painting – "Cézanne's Doubt" (1945) and "Eye and Mind" (1964) – and his lectures published in *World of Perception* (1948). One of the essential connections I trace between Woolf and Merleau-Ponty is their sustained belief in the instrumental role perception plays in understanding and interacting with the world. Both advocated for ways of perceiving that resisted what the phenomenologists called *pensée de survol* [thinking from above] and persistently sought new ways to articulate our "Being-in-the world,"[1] as Martin Heidegger[2] phrases it (84). Merleau-Ponty posits that the experience of Being-in-the-world is possible because of the synthesis of physiological and psychical elements acting through a body that is both interpreting and being interpreted by the world in which it exists. I argue that Woolf's understanding of perception and being parallels Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of intentionality, particularly as the term is developed in the Husserlian tradition. This is the idea that consciousness is aware of its positioning towards the world even as it is aware of itself as an autonomous entity. Merleau-Ponty expands upon Husserl's definition by using the image of an "intentional arc," a term he borrows from Kuno Fischer (Landes 114), as a way to argue that any conscious act "projects

[1] I capitalize this phrase throughout the dissertation to distinguish it as a phenomenological term, and to acknowledge the broad scope of its applications in metaphysical thought since Heidegger. Unless indicated otherwise, it should be assumed that I define the term in the way Maurice Merleau-Ponty understands it more generally: the state of existence that "characterizes the fundamental ambiguity of all human experience and phenomena," as opposed to Heidegger's more limited metaphor of a "relation between a container and a contained object" (Landes 29). With that stated, I am also in part drawing from Emma Simone's insightful examination of Woolf's and Heidegger's shared convictions regarding a human's involvement with their world: "an understanding of the individual as a temporal being; the emphasis upon intersubjective relations, insofar as Being-in-the-world is defined by Being-with-Others; and a consistent emphasis upon average everydayness as both determinative and representative of the individual's relationship to and with the world" (2).

[2] Although I do not employ Heidegger's philosophy in my study, his development of the term "Dasein (Da-sein: there-being)" was integral for thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty to understand more fully our active and embodied, not merely spatial, involvement with the world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains that "Dasein is never 'proximally' an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a 'relationship' towards the world. Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only because Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is" (84). This argument enabled Merleau-Ponty to posit that the experience of Being-in-the-world is possible because of the synthesis of physiological and psychical elements acting through a body that is both interpreting, and being interpreted by, the world in which it exists.

around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation" (*PhP* 137). For Merleau-Ponty, intentionality is as much an operation of the world acting upon the conscious self as it is the self acting in accordance with the phenomena of the world. In this way, "consciousness is meant for a world, which it neither embraces nor possesses, but toward which it is perpetually directed" (Marshall 239). Landes asserts that the intentional arc "is not an intellectual act, but an embodied and meaningful orientation toward the world" (114); it is a philosophical notion that incorporates the ways one moves and interacts within one's environments via *le corpse propre* [one's own body], which Merleau-Ponty compares to the function of the heart: "it continually breathes life into the visible spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within, and forms a system with it" (*PhP* 209). Merleau-Ponty asserts that there exists neither a preconceived plan nor a set of judgements in the moment-to-moment experiences of living. Rather, all the various dimensions of one's being (language, sexuality, consciousness) are involved in an all-encompassing work-in-progress, continually determining, orienting, and shifting one's perceptions of the world.

In Woolf's fiction as well as in her essays, the societal and interpersonal flux of interwar Britain is represented through diverse figures and their perspectives, as characters affect and are affected by spaces and the passage of time in disparate ways. But equally important is Woolf's expansive sense of the connectivity of human and non-human existence. This is where Merleau-Ponty provides a way to engage with the significance of individual and communal experiences in Woolf's painting-like descriptions. Merleau-Ponty's writings expand primarily upon what Husserl calls operative intentionality, which, according to Merleau-Ponty, "[e]stablishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life" (*PhP* lxxxii). As Mark Wrathall explains, this "unity as an experiencing being is like the unity of the world – it is not something I experience directly, but rather it is the background against which each particular experience can stand out" ("Existential" 39). In other words, an individual's intentionality is a projection of consciousness that is founded and constituted by a body acting and living in the world, rather than by a mind surveying its coordinates with the world from a purely objective stance. This is a core dynamic in *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Years*, with the detailed renderings of space and time and individual perception as intensely rational and immediately sensorial. It is why in my study of Woolf's fiction, I devote my attention to what Merleau-Ponty calls "bodily intentionality" (*WP* 10) or "body-schema" (Smith 19), particularly in its connection to the artist's

process. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes that "by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self, and, as it were, the subject of perception" (239). This passage touches on an integral principle in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of intentionality and raises the central questions of this project: how does a writer articulate and represent meaning through the ambiguity of embodied memory and perception? Both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty were keenly aware that the inherent challenge for any kind of artist was "to describe something which threatens to conceal itself the moment that we slip into the kind of reflective mode that allows us to describe it" (Wrathall, "Existential" 45). In order to address this difficulty, Merleau-Ponty "sought to develop a descriptive philosophy of perception, our kinaesthetic, prescientific, lived-bodily experience and cognition of the world—the unification of our affective, motor and sensory capacities" (Quinn 9). He maintained that our experience of the world is caught up in an ever-expanding network of relations, an embodied intentional arc that "resists articulation" by means of an intellectual construct (Wrathall, "Existential" 32). Both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty believed that in order to represent the unlimited possibilities of being, one had to be willing to re-engage with the content of the world, a return that precedes scientific systems and abstract mappings, and that openly delves, sometimes blindly, into charting the apparent chaos but also representing and engaging with the sensory possibilities of the modern world.

What Merleau-Ponty provides, then, is an approach through which to think through the interdisciplinarity of Woolf's representational strategies. More specifically, he offers a way to think across writing and painting through an analysis of Woolf's engagement with Bloomsbury approaches to formalism and significant form, and through a reading of key images from selected works of her fiction, where I explore embodiment as it reflects an ethical, communal impulse that is rendered consistently through Woolf's body of work. Here, I see Woolf's and Merleau-Ponty's written oeuvres as layered collages of repeated metaphors and images, creating – through association and proximity rather than systematic reasoning – a unified web of thought. For instance, Woolf's "A Sketch to the Past" (1939) is one of the most codified memoirs written in the twentieth century because it retrospectively divines and channels for the reader the implicit stylistic and thematic currents that shaped the artist's entire life and career. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's essay, "Cézanne's Doubt," encapsulates many of the instrumental concepts found in *Phenomenology of Perception* through an incisive and thoughtful critique of the methods and

thought processes of the painter, Paul Cézanne. And indeed, throughout their respective careers, both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty exemplified how thinkers and writers could draw from the visual arts to augment and enrich their craft. They believed the arts could, as Joseph Parry and Mark Wrathall suggest, "give us access to the world in the primordial situation of our being; in our bodies in a particular time and place, and from within particular contexts and vantage points – in other words, in the pre-reflective space we occupy before we begin to think the world and its meaning by means of concepts we've learned to apply to our experience" (4). For Woolf, acknowledging and representing this embodied mode of being was an interdisciplinary endeavour: her propensity for crossing disciplinary boundaries in her fiction is unmatched by her contemporaries, and is evidenced by the wealth of critical attention given to the subject. Maggie Humm[3] and Jane Goldman have written extensively on Woolf's connection to modernist and Bloomsbury aesthetics. As Goldman observes, Woolf was "interested not merely in how the eye physically records the world, but in how consciousness, 'the mind', deals with the information" (*Feminist* 125). Diane F. Gillespie[4] has been particularly instrumental in exploring the creative influences between Woolf and Vanessa Bell; Ann Banfield has examined Woolf's preoccupation with time and Post-Impressionist theories, and Sarah Latham Phillips has observed the connections between Woolf's writing and the aesthetic concerns of the Cubist painters.[5] Likewise, Merleau-Ponty's primary concern was with the insights one could learn through both the process and reception of artistic production. This kind of examination requires a particular way of seeing and engaging with the world, one that is forever framed by limitations and indeterminacies in one's apprehension and interpretation of one's surroundings; therefore, if there is a method at work, it is one which is perpetually beyond the reach of definitive solutions and categorical distinctions. He believed that our perceptions of the world are represented best not according to an overarching paradigm but rather as a collection of dialectical inklings that

[3] See *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema* (2002).
[4] See *Sisters' Arts: The Writings and Paintings of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (1988).
[5] Phillips writes that "Cubism abandoned the idea of a fixed viewpoint presenting the artist's accumulated idea of a subject rather than an imitation of its appearance [. . .]. These ideas of Cézanne, Picasso and Braque, and Fry and Clive Bell, who brought them to England, were absorbed by Woolf who built up layers in her writing in the same way as the artists subtly overlapped patches of colour" (11).

reiterate in myriad ways our unconscious day-to-day experiences. This expansive state of being and all it encompasses in its broad swathe of experience, much like the experience of viewing paintings in a gallery that invite interaction on multiple and simultaneous levels, results in a heightened perceptual and embodied involvement in the world.

By bringing together Merleau-Ponty and Woolf, I am not solving but exploring the dynamics and problems of representing Being-in-the-world — especially as both writers engage with painting as a way to approach embodiment and intentionality. That exploration is necessarily selective when it comes to engaging with the precursors, complexities, and contradictions of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical work. [6] This project does not expand upon the many inroads and contributions that have been made in the fields of existentialism and phenomenology since Husserl and Heidegger. Nor is it an attempt to differentiate all of the contradicting variables between Husserlian and Merleau-Pontian paradigms. As Richard Zaner recognizes, just as Husserl's analytical systems and foundational terms (intentionality, embodiment, Being-in-the-world) have been variously used and defined, so Merleau-Ponty's concepts and terms have been complicated by use: "within his own work itself, he does not always use the same term in the same way. The over-all result of this is at times a quite confusing amalgam of methods, analyses, and points of view" (129). Unlike Zaner, however, this "amalgam" is what interests me most: that is, the interpretive possibilities of Merleau-Ponty's idiosyncratic system of thought — particularly where it offers insight into understanding Woolf's

[6] Merleau-Ponty drew much of his inspiration, particularly in regards to perception and being, from the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl[6] and Heidegger and weighed the implications of his thought against various other nineteenth century philosophical fields, especially the more empirical branches of psychology such as Gestalt theory and positivism. His goal was to gather what he thought to be the most relevant and useful aspects of these distinctive nineteenth and early twentieth century branches of knowledge into an ever-expanding tapestry of philosophical interrogation (Landes xi).Positivistic philosophy, in particular the theories of David Hume, has a number of overlapping elements with phenomenology, most notably the emphasis on the "sense-given as the real source of knowledge" (Sinha 562). Durganand Sinha writes that "positivism thus tends to be a philosophy of the given which seeks to base all systems of knowledge, free from ideal presuppositions, on the 'positive,' i.e., on what is actually and originally given" (562). However, Husserl and, later, Merleau-Ponty, part ways with positivism's tendency towards a more empirical categorization of subjective sensory experience, and sought to develop a philosophy that recognizes "the intuition of universals, conceptual generalities, and general relations, instead of being restricted to the experience of individual or temporary particularities" (Sinha 566).

style of writing. Merleau-Ponty's suggestive rather than denotative approaches to characterizing the body and its interactions with the world are what makes his work a generative tool in approaching Woolf's varied methods for representing memory, embodied experience, and material existence.

There are, of course, significant limitations in drawing connections between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Woolf's prose. In particular, Merleau-Ponty's universalizing gestures are unproductive, especially given the ethical impulses of Woolf's body of writing and a consistent tension between unity on the one hand, and the control wielded by a heteronormative Imperial patriarchy on the other. Here, Jacques Derrida's *On Touching* offers a crucial perspective — one in line with Zaner's argument — on how Merleau-Ponty does not really diverge from the totalizing tendencies of the Husserlian phenomenological tradition. As Derrida notes, he gives the "greatest weight" to concepts such as the gestalt and synaesthesia for explaining the intentionality of mind and body; however, contradictorily, his language centres around the unique qualities of vision and "never excludes a hierarchical order from it" (206). Although my study draws upon Merleau-Ponty's interest in gestalt psychology, in relation to Woolf's work, I am careful to recognize it not as an aggregation of being, which Derrida accuses Merleau-Ponty of asserting, but rather as way to indicate the effect Woolf achieves in her narratives: an experience of immersion in the sensory world through the depiction of intersubjective spheres of overlapping patterns of experience. In this light, I draw from Merleau-Ponty's application of gestalt as it represents a term situating and explaining perception. Rather than operating as a one-to-one relation between senses and stimuli, gestalt is here read as an experiential unfolding that incorporates both the empirical sensory data of science as well as the more ephemeral elements of the psyche (memory, emotions, intuition), and that allows for the possibility that conscious thought is conjoined with the unconscious processes of existence (*Structure of Behavior* 206).[7] As a broader concept or image, gestalt enables engagement with

[7] Landes observes that although Merleau-Ponty found Gestalt theory useful as a foundational concept for understanding phenomenological structures, he often maintained that "Gestalt theorists (such as Koffka) ultimately retreat from the philosophical consequences of their theory in order to adopt the 'realist postulates which are those of every psychology' [. . .] 'Ultimately they consider the structures of the perceived world as the simple result of certain physical and physiological processes'" (88). Merleau-Ponty argued instead that "Gestalt psychology reveals

Post-Impressionist aesthetics, and the artistic focus on compositional harmony, as well as with the ways in which Woolf writes fictional worlds that are comprehended as represented environments involving an entanglement of thought and physical senses.

Given Woolf's suspicion of hegemonic systems of thought that lead to division, as important is an acknowledgement of the ethical drawbacks of Merleau-Ponty's stance. Derrida points to the anthropocentrism that neither allows for an intentionality across animal species nor adequately addresses the problems of physical disability and racial and gender discrimination. Similar issues have prompted criticism from a number of feminist scholars over the past century. Although philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir,[8] Judith Butler, and Luce Irigaray have agreed with Merleau-Ponty's premise that the body must be understood through its multifaceted relations with the object world, they have been critical of his tendency towards a language of universalization which often results in an obscuration of sex and gender and sexuality, and their defining differences. The problem with this denial is that it establishes a disproportioned erasure of female identity as it relates to the embodied self — an issue which is compounded by the reality that most philosophical discourses utilize an ideological language that privileges male experiences and bodies over others. In response to the misogyny inherent in the phenomenological tradition, feminist thought has aimed in its critique to create productive alternatives. For instance, Beauvoir's overarching premise in *The Second Sex* (1949) — that the objectification of women's bodies is a cultural process enacted through everyday restrictions and practices — has paved the way for other theorists to define the female body as an expansive site with distinct, yet overlapping, regions involving sex, gender, and biology. Butler has advocated for the social/cultural dimensions of female embodiment in order to highlight the historical process by which the body becomes imbued with cultural meaning,[9] while Irigaray has drawn attention to the fecundity of motherhood and the maternal figure, particularly in her critique of Merleau-Pontian theories of embodiment, which often seem to ignore differences between male

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the emergence of meaningful structures in the world that in fact dissolve the categories of classical thought" (Landes 88).

[8] Beauvoir writes a review of *Phenomenology of Perception* in *La phénoménologie de la perception de Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, which first appears in *Les temps modernes* in 1945.

[9] See "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, Eds Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, Sarah Stanbury (London: Routledge, 2003) 97-110.

and female materiality.[10]

There are clear limitations involved, then, in drawing upon the work of a philosopher who, for all of his radical notions regarding the intentionality of the body, was entrenched within the very institutions Woolf denounced in her essays and fiction, and who was, at the very least, ambivalent to the sex and gender inequalities implied by his theories. Nonetheless, alongside several feminist scholars — Sonia Kruks, Johanna Oksala, and Gail Weiss, for example — my goal is to draw upon Merelau-Ponty's contributions to phenomenology, and examine how his approaches for understanding the body as an intrapersonal entity may, as Kruks states, "help us to grasp significant aspects of human existence that span such distinctions as class, race, and gender" (35) — the transient sense of unity or pattern beneath the cotton wool that Woolf represents as fleeting, contingent, but crucial in its social and political as well as individual impact. For Oksala, "Merleau-Ponty's body-subject can provide feminist theory with an account of the female body that acknowledges its generative status instead of viewing it only as a passive product of cultural crafting" (225). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's thoughtful and open-minded examination of the world through the multi-lensed scope of the senses compares closely with Woolf's conception in her fiction of the female embodied self — as seen in her representations of Betty Flanders, Clarissa Dalloway, and Eleanor Pargiter — a self that is at once outwardly diffusive and inward-moving, that suggests a range of distinct and overlapping templates for Being-in-the-world.

This multifarious quality that characterizes both Woolf's and Merleau-Ponty's work allows me to explore the effect of the overlap among branches of art, philosophy, literature, and history in their writing as a whole, and how these intersections provide a basis for interpreting specific passages in Woolf's fiction. I wish to draw insight from their idiosyncratic approaches to addressing the dualities of mind and body, and of lived experience and the artistic imagination, and to engage them in a critical discourse across disciplinary and historical boundaries. As Donald A. Landes asserts,

> [r]eading a philosopher is an art. It requires a confrontation or an encounter such that one gears into the open sense or the unthought directions of his or her thought, taking it up

[10] See *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (1993).

into one's own thought, which necessarily introduces something of oneself into the reading, without succumbing to the opposite danger of a subjective reading. (xii)

This intellectual and creative receptiveness is relevant when studying the writings of Woolf and Merleau-Ponty. Their careers have many branching paths, and each trajectory is at once a clarification, an alteration, and a re-creation of the driving thematics of their thought. Such creative motivation is the bulwark of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and the reason why Woolf's written techniques suggest on panoramic painting of the immersive worlds she creates through her essays and fiction. Her representations of the deeply material and yet highly contingent and impressionistic experiences of interwar Britain circle and spiral into new possibilities of understanding, especially in relation to her ongoing commitment to connection, to recognition of the interaction between human and non-human registers of existence, and to the ways in which such unity and moments of its recognition counter divisive hierarchies.

My focus is Woolf's artistic methodology and it's nuanced and often subtle ethical dimensions. These suggest the potential of Merleau-Ponty as a way into Woolf, as well as his place in a larger trajectory of phenomenological and sociological theories, such as the work of Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel de Certeau. Such materialist responses to constructionist trends and ideologies paved the way for contemporary theorists, notably Rosi Braidotti, Manuel DeLanda, and Jane Bennett, and their role in establishing the bases of new materialism. As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost describe, new materialists "emphasize the productivity and resilience of matter," specifically the "myriad ways in which matter is both self-constituting and invested with — and reconfigured by — inter subjective interventions that have their quotient of materiality" (7). I gesture to this line of thought in my study because it correlates with my readings, especially where scenes signal "Woolf's vision of the world as an interconnected mesh of human and nonhuman materialities, all of which exist on equal planes of subjectivity and agency" (Lostoski 72). The interdisciplinary thrust of new materialism — in the way it follows threads of Foucauldian genealogy, de Certeau's sociologies of the everyday, and Merleau-Ponty's theories of corporeal experience to its own theoretical conclusions — offers a potentially fecund line of inquiry for future contemporary Woolf studies, and highlights the relevancy and premonitory nature of Woolf's thought — in particular, the ways in which she responds to the global and socio-political crises of her day through a life-long commitment to describing the world as it is perceived by the senses, and delineating the private

and public spaces of her quotidian life.

Although the materialist and indeed the material aspects of Woolf's writing are addressed in this study — for instance, in my discussion of *Kew Gardens* as a project that exemplifies the object-centred nature of image and text — it is more in line with the scholarship on the phenomenological undercurrents in Woolf's writing and representational methods. As Mark Hussey notes in *The Singing of the Real World*, Woolf's characters exist on a scale of "opposing extremes" of embodiment and "unembodiment." (5). Drawing from R.D. Laing and Merleau-Ponty, he suggests that the "question of the way the body is lived must precede any account of self precisely because human beings *live* their bodies as their foundation in the world" (19). Through the late 1980s and 1990s, a handful of scholars, most notably Laura Doyle,[11] Louise Westling,[12] and Suzette A. Henke, examine theories of embodiment in *To the Lighthouse*, "A Room of One's Own," and *The Waves*. Doyle's study is particularly illuminating in the way it tracks phenomenological currents in *To the Lighthouse*, and describes how the narrator "stations herself within the objects which situate the mother's and other characters' presence in the world" (43). This condition of "embededness" is particularly the case for Mrs. Ramsay, who represents a "site of uncoded embodiment" that "transgresses the patriarchal" and challenges the "traditional motherly frame" (43). More recent scholarship has explored political and sociological themes, as well as more general philosophical concerns, including self-awareness, subjectivity, and temporality, and draws connections with Merleau-Pontian concepts such as intentionality, reversibility, and the chiasm.[13] Naomi Toth[14] examines Lily Briscoe's painting process as a way

[11] See "'These Emotions of the Body': Intercorporeal Narrative in *To the Lighthouse*." (1994).
[12] In "Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World," a phenomenological examination of *Between the Acts*, Louise Westling acknowledges a direct connection between Woolf and Merleau-Ponty, particularly in the way they embrace the interdisciplinary aspects of modernist thought. She writes that "Woolf's dynamic, participatory vision of the real is very close to the thinking of French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, who was responding from within the same modernist intellectual milieu as Virginia Woolf, to the same developments in physics, and the same twentieth-century impulse to overthrow or move beyond the Cartesian separation from subject and object, and its complicity with the Newtonian mechanistic metaphors of the cosmos" (856).
[13] Landes states that the "term derives from the Greek letter *chi* ("*x*") and indicates an intertwining or a crossing-over relation or arrangment. [. . .] Merleau-Ponty uses the term in his late ontology as a manner of capturing his understanding of flesh and reversibility of touching/touched or of the visible and the invisible." (37-38)

of seeing/thinking the world; Jacob Rump investigates the ways in which *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the "unexplainable" by using Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "spontaneity of sense" (317), and Kimberly Engdahl Coates[15] applies Sara Ahmed's phenomenological thought to Woolf's constructions of social space in some of her major novels. My contribution to this scholarship is an extended examination of Woolf's literary innovations in relation to developments in visual art and philosophical thought in the interdisciplinary context of Bloomsbury. As yet there has not been a focused study on the significance of space and perception in Woolf's prose works, particularity one that utilizes Merleau-Ponty's theoretical connections to modernism and Post-Impressionist art, and explores the ways in which Woolf's writing style synthesizes these themes to create a body of prose that is as diverse in its stylistic applications as it is cohesive in its descriptions of the perceived world.

In chapters one and two of my dissertation, I examine the range of connections Woolf developed, directly and indirectly, in the fields of art, philosophy, and literature, and examine how her prose experiments are entrenched in the Post-Impressionist movement. Woolf's interdisciplinary approach to representing the perceptual world was deeply influenced by her involvement with the Bloomsbury group, and by the intimacy she established with its members – most especially her sister, Vanessa Bell, and the art critic, Roger Fry. Banfield has shown that Woolf's explorations of aesthetic and formalist concerns in her prose, particularly through her interest in perception and time, were shaped by the philosophies of Bertrand Russell and G.E Moore, which posit that "[t]ime passes not as durée but as a series of still moments" (471). In chapter one, I explore how Woolf was influenced by the thinking of the Cambridge scholars, in particular by Fry's "dualist aesthetic," which combines the analytical qualities of Impressionist techniques with Post-Impressionism's focus on geometric design and philosophical concepts of time and space (471). For instance, in a letter to Fry, Woolf discusses her novel *To the Lighthouse*: "I meant nothing by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together" (*L3* 385). Henry Harrington writes that Woolf's novelistic strategy – similar to the way Lily Briscoe "draws her line in the center" of her portrait

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[14] See "The Very Jar on the Nerves": Reading Lily Briscoe's Painting with Phenomenology." (2013).

[15] See "Virginia Woolf's Queer Time and Place: Wartime London and a World Aslant" in Brenda Helt's and Madelyn Detloff's *Queer Bloomsbury* (2016).

of Mrs. Ramsay to "deliberately [break] up what remains of illusionist space in her painting" – makes it "obvious that it is the picture frame, not the volume of exterior reality, that dictates the space" of the represented world (372). In other words, Fry's Post-Impressionist theories helped Woolf to understand the importance of conceiving a novelistic work as a unified whole, as one would understand a painting when standing from a distance, rather than as a succession of causal events that culminate into a linearly organized plot structure.

I contextualize how Woolf utilized and developed Fry's theories by explaining the significance of his Post-Impressionist Exhibitions in London. The artists represented in the 1910 show – most notably Édouard Manet, Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh, and Paul Cézanne – helped to bridge the transition from the more empirical concerns of the Impressionists to Fry's formalist aesthetic. Fry emphasized that works of art should evoke in the viewer an aesthetic recognition of the unifying design of the creation in question, or what the art critic, Clive Bell, called "significant form" (*Art* 8). The experience of perceiving and meditating upon a particular organization of forms, planes, colours, and textures enlivens an alternate reality in the mind's eye, which may be equated with the experience one's body has as it encounters the rhythms and patterns of the phenomenal world. Fry's broader project was to promote the kind of visceral encounters a viewer might have when contemplating a work of art. He believed that the late Impressionist painters, such as Cézanne, Georges Seurat, and Manet, were already moving away from pure representation towards a more formally expressive and reflective mode of interpreting the world around them.

Fry's empirical approach to art history and aesthetic theory construction, adopted from his training in the natural sciences at Cambridge, allowed him to record the attributes of a broad range of British and European painters and to trace a comprehensible development in art through the Victorian era and into the twentieth century. His observational skills as an art critic and his first-hand knowledge of the practice of painting made him an invaluable presence in the British art world, and for the same reasons, had a clear impact upon Woolf's writing career. In chapter one, I argue that the aesthetics of Post-Impressionism align closely with the concept of intentionality: in particular, Husserl's understanding that a human's perceptual intake of the world is mediated by clues that enable a synthesis between noesis, the act of perceiving in the immediate present, and noema, the content being perceived in the immediate past (Landes 136). My claim in this chapter is that Woolf recognized and utilized the phenomenological

undercurrents of Post-Impressionist thought and explored through her prose the more indistinct territories of time, memory, and unconscious actions that, according to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, cannot be explained by conventional branches of science, which continually attempt to understand the indeterminacies of existence through mechanistic theories of causality. By incorporating Post-Impressionist aesthetics, Woolf managed to develop a prose style that allows the characters in her stories to be understood through a more phenomenological mode, one which I argue ultimately extends beyond the scientific limitations implicit in Fry's theories. Although the multiple permutations of Fry's thought highlight the fluidity of his theories and his persistent endeavour to find a synthesis between art and life — which, in Woolf's words, spoke to "the tolerance, the wide experience, that lay behind the hob-goblin mask of the man who had the reputation of being either a crack-brained theorist or the irresponsible champion of impossible beliefs" (*RF* 262) — he felt that he was never able to reconcile how the observable data an artist encounters in the world of the senses could be coherently combined with the impressions these sensory details make upon the imagination.

Through her immersion in the Post-Impressionist milieu, Woolf developed the ability to see the world through the descriptive lens of a painter, which leads me to discuss in chapter two how her sister, Vanessa Bell — a painter at the centre of the Bloomsbury Group, and a significant part of Fry's Post-Impressionist movement — was, as Humm notes, "a central stimulus throughout Woolf's life" ("Virginia Woolf" 3). Woolf's responses to Vanessa's paintings and artistic practice as a whole are ways to understand the tensions and impetuses involved in the sisters' shared participation in the dynamics of literary and artistic production. Goldman notes that "Woolf shares her sister's aesthetic preoccupations: they both try to show non-physical experiences as formal realities, at the same time emphasizing and illuminating feminine experience. Both show communication between people as material events" (*Feminist* 150). Throughout their careers, Vanessa and Virginia collaborated on and envisioned countless creative projects.[16] They explored the potentials of marrying dual art mediums and devised new ways to represent the ever-fluctuating patterns and textures of life. The illustrated edition of *Kew Gardens* (1927) is one of the most significant and ambitious collaborative ventures the sisters managed to complete. The illustrations and text work together as aesthetic counterpoints that draw attention

[16] See Humm's *Snapshots of Bloomsbury* and Gillespie's *The Sisters' Arts*.

to the materiality of the book and of the act of reading/viewing a text. The project is fraught with tensions both in the process of its production and in the artistic statement it makes: on the one hand, it is a beautiful exposé of the sisters' artistic talents and showcases the ways in which their arts overlap; on the other hand, it displays quite dramatically the distinctive boundaries between visual and literary arts, and the unique vision of reality each sister harboured. I would argue that because of these tensions, *Kew Gardens* and other works that proved creatively and emotionally impactful for both sisters – Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and Bell's *Studland Beach* (1912) – enabled Woolf and Bell to develop their respective arts while navigating the ebbs and flows of domestic responsibilities, family trauma, and personal relationships.

The creative intimacy/rivalry shared with her sister enabled Woolf to be open to the expressive possibilities of the visual arts, and spurred her to create fictional worlds that are, like a series of paintings, vividly rendered. Learning to look at her sister's paintings helped her to become all the more immersed in the aesthetic sensibility of Bloomsbury. In a letter to her sister in 1918, Woolf declares that Vanessa's paintings give her "'infinite pleasure,'" and have an affecting influence upon her "'half-developed aesthetic emotions'" (qtd. in Kostkowska 81). Woolf's use of the term "aesthetic emotions" references a concept Clive Bell first develops in *Art*, and which became common parlance for Bloomsbury group members. In a letter to Leonard Woolf in 1913, Vanessa provides her own conception of the theory: "'I often look at a picture – for instance I did at the Picasso trees by the side of a lake – without seeing in the least what the things are. . . . I got quite a strong emotion from the forms and colours, but it wasn't changed when weeks afterwards it was pointed out to me by chance that the blue was a lake'" (qtd. in Tickner 68). Vanessa's engagement with pictures is guided by philosophical objectivity, one that distances her from her personal associations and attachments to the depicted subject and that fosters investigative participation with its forms, shapes, and colours. As I argue throughout chapter two, the sisters' absorption of this guiding aesthetic principle is present in all of their artistic collaborations and correspondences, and propelled Woolf to gain confidence in her literary strengths as she persistently found ways to describe through her own art form, sometimes in ways a painter could not, the diffusive rhythms of experience.

The Bloomsbury strategy of establishing a stance of objectivity when making and interpreting works of art enabled Woolf to explore the aesthetic and philosophical implications of lived experience, to observe and represent through her prose a collection of intersecting and

overlapping gestalts of Being-in-the-world. Throughout "A Sketch of the Past," for instance, Woolf interrogates her most significant memories as a way to depict a network of images that suggest a phenomenological involvement with the world. In chapter three, I use Woolf's memoir to examine how she represents perception as an embodied engagement with what Merleau-Ponty calls the "content" of being, which is "surrounded with references to the past and future, to other places and other things, to human possibilities and situations" (Baldwin 10). Woolf describes her significant memories as embodied moments of "being," which over time become "embedded in many more moments of non-being" ("Sketch" 70). In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf provides a rich tapestry of memories and sensations drawn from her childhood, many of which are vivid descriptions of her mother. Her reminiscences are continually underscored by a tenuous phenomenological philosophy. One instance of being that Woolf recalls is a brief encounter with a boy with a mental disability to whom she gives a bag of toffee:

> Again I had that hopeless sadness; that collapse I have described before; as if I were passive under some sledge-hammer blow; exposed to a whole avalanche of meaning that had heaped itself up and discharged itself upon me, unprotected, with nothing to ward it off, so that I huddled up at my end of the bath, motionless, I could not explain it. (78)

It is significant that the impact of this memory is more substantial than the remembrance itself. The recollection is a kind of indeterminate epiphany, "the past recaptured," as Morris Beja puts it (15). For Woolf, memory is a never-ending cycle of internal impressions – as seen, for example, in her repeated descriptions in "A Sketch of the Past" of the "space beneath the nursery table," which she describes as "a great black space with the table-cloth hanging down in folds on the outskirts in the distance; and myself roaming about there, and meeting Nessa" (78) – and which, when represented on the page, establish a range of uncertainties and deviations from any predetermined pattern. Likewise, I argue that Woolf's representations of significant moments of Being-in-the-world in her fiction enable her characters, much like her narrator in "A Sketch of the Past," to exist in the interstitial spaces of the narratives, allowing their existence to spread beyond the confines of intellectualized systems of thought.

In the second part of my project, I conduct a close reading of three of Woolf's major novels in order to demonstrate more directly how Woolf's innovations in style helped her to represent consciousness and its relationship to the object world. I argue that in *Jacob's Room* Woolf's deliberate focus on the obscure aspects of consciousness establishes an intentional world

of self-referential relations among the characters and their surroundings that reflects a gestalt of internal and external dimensions of being. In this way, Woolf paves the stylistic ground for what Pam Morris calls "worldly realism" (7). Using Jacques Rancière's concept of the "dissensual aesthetic," Morris argues that Woolf's writing represents "that which is afforded by impressions gained through both the senses and the intellect but with a reversal of idealist emphasis from mind to what is physically present to ear, eye and hand" (6). Jacob Flanders, for instance, is made known to the reader through a composite of descriptive passages and vignettes. Readers are continually enabled to orient themselves, not by any clear temporal or linear plot device, but rather by the various spaces and environments through which Jacob moves and with which he interacts. Such a representational method corresponds to Merleau-Ponty's approach to space in *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which he argues that our experience of space incorporates a much broader and all-encompassing arrangement of perceptual elements than classical views have been willing to accept. He asserts that space is a perpetual bodily reorientation with the ever-shifting coordinates of the world in which one lives, rather than simply an intellectually devised system of relations among the things that inhabit our world,

In *Jacob's Room,* Woolf's depictions of the characters and their movements through the text are never fully resolved; hence, their presences in the novel continually evade reasoned judgement. Woolf's narrator concedes early in the novel that "[i]t is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done" (24). Woolf employs an array of techniques through the multiple perspectives of her characters to realize Jacob's actions and thoughts in the various environments of the narrative – from the expansive atmosphere of the seaside of his youth to the more confined interiors of trains, carriages, and Cambridge rooms. Jacob's embodied interaction with these various spaces echoes Merleau-Ponty's argument that the three dimensions of our world – height, width, and breadth – operate according to a synthesis enacted by the body moving and interacting with the elements of the physical world, not by a mind perceiving movements "without an external reference point, and without any relativity" (*PhP* 281). Woolf's representations of being in the novel suggest multiple rhythms of psychic awareness and physical sensations that happen through, and because of, an individual character's experience of space. In turn, all of the dimensions of this experience interpenetrate and haunt, as it were, the whole of the character's temporal existence in its world.

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf writes passages that represent an ever-moving spectacle of sensation and reflection. Her descriptions of Jacob's world suggest a perspective that contrasts with Fry's dualist theories and with Bertrand Russell's assertion in *An Outline of Philosophy* that "[n]o man can perceive by sight what is not in his field of vision, but he may look straight at a thing without perceiving it" (62). Russell argues that experience is atomized and apprehended primarily through causal and one-to-one relations between thought and perception. Similarly, Fry proposed that time is perceived as a succession of units of being. In other words, both the conceptual and the physical aspects of temporality are represented as static impressions, which merge via formal and thematic associations. Conversely, Woolf's multiple descriptive lenses, which provide a range of perspectives and understandings of space, are essential for creating an ever-shifting universe in relation to Jacob. Woolf's heightened and reflexive awareness of the significance of perception encourages readers to consider "both our feelings and our observations, both the known and the inferred, both what is present and what is absent" as the scenes themselves, like a series of paintings in a gallery, guide the reader's focus in multiple directions (Wall 311). It is this contradictory experience that enables the reader to apprehend the intentionality of Jacob's life, to "believe in the world" that Jacob inhabits without being provided with a complete and comprehensible representation of the whole (*PhP* 311).

Jacob's Room offers a range of possibilities for representing a character existing in the world and intersects with Merleau-Ponty's notion that perceiving the world means to "stand in wonder before the world and cease to be complicit with it in order to reveal the flow of motivations and carry me into it" (*PhP* 309). Likewise, in *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf constructs a complex phenomenological universe through the intentional thoughts and actions of a character who experiences herself always in relation to and interaction with London. Clarissa Dalloway's perceptions are intertwined with temporal movements that are frequently displayed as a quick succession of images incorporating memories from the past mingled with immediate sensations of the present. This construct of time echoes in part Henri Bergson's understanding of duration and of his concept of remembered time, which he outlines in *Matter and Memory*. Bergson recognizes that perception is inherently speculative and based primarily upon a succession of images arranged by the memory facilities of the brain. However, I would argue that, unlike Bergson, Woolf addresses through her prose the philosophical ramifications of his theories. Rather than conforming to the closed parameters of analytical conceptions of time, she creates

epiphanic moments that are themselves an immanent part of the scenes from the past they attempt to modify. Joseph Allen Boone calls this the "double pull of consciousness," in which every element in the narrative is "reciprocally" wrapped and unfolded within a web of connections so that they all participate in a "continuous double motion that creates the illusion of a seamless and unbroken whole" (175). Boone's analysis echoes Merleau-Ponty's assertion that consciousness is a "perceptual experience which gives us the passage from one moment to the next and thus realizes the unity of time" (Wrathall, "Existential" 48). In this light, a phenomenological reading enables recognition of the novel not merely as layered but as splicing multiple sensorial elements and presenting a kaleidoscope of perspectives, which are defined by the overlapping boundaries of perception and language.

Clarissa Dalloway orders her world largely in accordance with her relationships and communications with other people. As Caroline Webb argues, "the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* invites us to make allusive connections that seem as engagingly communal as Clarissa's culminating party" (Webb 280). This connectivity is based on Clarissa's embodied conversations and gestures in the past, as well as the immediate impressions she shares with other consciousnesses in the present. In this way, Clarissa is a living repository who channels the perspectives of other intentional bodies. Her connection with Peter Walsh, for instance, is both just as profound and just as alien as her affinity with characters she never meets directly, such as the people on the Strand or Septimus Smith. In this way, she exudes a timelessness or transcendence that enables diffusive social connectivity and, at the same time, an impermeable individuality that tunnels through her past and future horizons: "She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on" (*MD* 9). This passage highlights how Woolf invokes a tension between Clarissa's class privilege, which enables her to transcend, and her desire for unity that would dismiss the value and impact of class difference. Through the character of Clarissa, Woolf presents throughout the novel a fractured gestalt, similar to the composite spaces in *Jacob's Room*, of multiple pieces of existence all spliced together and positioned within a wide expanse of unknowable territory — for instance, the irrationality of Septimus as it intersects with patriarchal logic; or, the moments of queer desire on the part of Clarissa and Sally and Septimus as they intermingle with hegemonic conceptions of sexuality. This intermixture of seemingly disparate ways of being suggests that Woolf is

presenting an alternate form of communal experience, one which simultaneously invokes and fails to engage with the bifurcations of social existence. As in her memoir, she combines "many bright colours; many distinct sounds; some human beings, caricatures; comic; several violent moments of being," which "always [include] a circle of the scene which they cut out: and all surrounded by a vast space" ("Sketch" 79). The cloud-like consciousness of Bond Street, and of Clarissa's interior thoughts, weaves together the diffusive boundaries of perception and of representing being.

Another manifestation of the model Clarissa Dalloway embodies, someone who exists both inside and outside the hegemonic parameters of class and gender, is the character Eleanor Pargiter from Woolf's final novel, *The Years*. Interestingly, although *The Years* relies on a seemingly conventional third-person approach that may be likened to Woolf's narration in the earlier novels, *A Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), its treatment of embodiment and perception is notably phenomenological. Much like Clarissa Dalloway's inner world, Eleanor's subjectivity permeates outward. However, unlike the more limited time-span of Clarissa's perceptive experiences, Eleanor's diffusive immanence delineates the transformations she encounters across a range of social and familial boundaries over the course of a life span. I examine how Eleanor's movements, along with those of all of the significant characters in the novel, display the phenomenological concept of reversibility, which is "the living relation of [. . .] one who perceives with both the body and the world" (*PhP* 216). According to Merleau-Ponty, reversibility is a foundational state of being-in-the-world that involves an entanglement between the investigative faculties of the body (seeing, hearing, touch) and the material objects of the world. Through the bodily operation of perceiving the world one encounters a reciprocal exchange of meaning that is grounded in lived experience. Eleanor's sensorial observations — I give especial attention to her visual acuity —and interior thoughts entwine with the perceptual world so that they are "two sides of a single act" (*PhP* 210) and represent an encounter with lived experience that blurs the boundary between interior and exterior modes of consciousness.

In *The Years*, the displacement of the Pargiter family and the various shades of alienation the characters feel are blended together by what Jeri Johnson calls "an alternating rhythm of light and dark, illumination and obscurity," and which allow for a range of movements within and between the spaces in which the characters exist (xxvii). In this way, *The Years* represents another manifestation in Woolf's understanding of space and time that utilizes moments of vivid

descriptions to create a cohesive construct in which a unifying pattern of past, present, and future is perceived fleetingly by her characters. In some ways, Woolf draws upon the methods she employs in *Mrs. Dalloway* and offers descriptions that situate the characters within a fully rendered world; she reminds the reader frequently of the specificities of this world through the characters' attuned perceptual observances. Thus, I argue, the characters in *The Years* manifest multifaceted panoramas of being, which express lighted paths through the text. Woolf achieves an expansive family portrait primarily through vivid depictions of the characters' experience of and engagement with their environments, which, I argue, is both determined and mediated by her representations of the reversibility of their bodies.

In *The Years*, Woolf achieves a sense of heightened clarity by knowing how to write ambiguity. As Merleau-Ponty argues, the nature of perception lies in its incompleteness: if time, for instance, projects infinitely towards both the future and the past, then a person's encounter with time is always just on the horizon of perception, just as light is forever suggesting the presence of an object by existing just beyond its implied edges. In this sense, time, space, embodiment, and all of the other properties of lived experience are not mere "[objects] of our knowledge, but rather [dimensions] of our being" (*PhP* 438). The character of Eleanor changes with each reading because Woolf does not render her with a pre-formulated design. Rather, she displays a kind of luminous aura towards which her family gravitates in the "1880" section, and of which every other character in the novel seems intuitively aware. She manifests an ever-present conundrum of being that both absorbs and emanates the spaces of her world. As the character of Eleanor demonstrates, Woolf is at home creating fictional worlds in the territory of the unknown. Regarding artistic creation, she writes that "'nothing – no 'method,' no experiment, even of the wildest – is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence'" (qtd. in Ziarek 111). Ewa Ziarek recognizes that "[a]lthough the word experiment might be associated with the worn-out clichés of modernism, for Woolf, the stakes of experimental writing are entwined with the status of praxis, femininity, and potentiality" as "exemplified" by the template from Woolf's 1924 essay on the significance of character in fiction (111). The wide-ranging stylistic claims of Woolf's writing stem not just from her embrace of indeterminacy, but also from the connection between the indeterminate or un-categorizable and the interdisciplinary.

For Woolf, understanding the world of perception is to piece together relations while also leaving fractures and spaces so that subjectivity and objectivity (space, time, thoughts, physical

senses) are made visible through relationships to what is invisible. In a similar light, my project overlays and juxtaposes two distinct minds from two separate generations and disciplines as a way to bring new critical understanding to the development of one of our most interpretatively entrenched modernist prose writers. Both Woolf's and Merleau-Ponty's methodologies were interdisciplinary at their core: they incorporated a diverse range of historical methods and fields of inquiry into uniquely presented philosophical and artistic visions. As Woolf makes apparent in works such as *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (1934), and in many instances in her letters and essays, she was, like Merleau-Ponty, tremendously interested in the insights to be gained from aesthetic theories and from the creative processes of visual artists. They each turned to the arts, especially the art of painting, as a way to expand their understanding of the permeable ambiguity of life, or what Merleau-Ponty called the zone between complete objectivity and complete subjectivity. Woolf uses the metaphor of "the divine gift of silence" throughout *Walter Sickert*, a gift that has, she explains, generally been attributed to the painter. However, near the end of the essay, she illustrates the zone of silence that a writer and a painter share:

> Let us hold painting by the hand a moment longer, for though they must part in the end, painting and writing have much to tell each other; they have much in common. The novelist after all wants to make us see. Gardens, rivers, skies, clouds changing, the colour of a woman's dress, landscapes that bask beneath lovers, twisted woods that people walk in when they quarrel – novels are full of pictures like these. The novelist is always saying to himself how can I bring the sun on to my page? How can I show the night and the moon rising? And he must often think that to describe a scene is the worst way to show it. It must be done with one word, or with one word in skilful contrast with another. (22)

This passage reveals Woolf's sensitivity to the various intersections where the painter and the novelist walk. Throughout this discursive exploration of art and literature, the words on the page divert in various directions of thought to simulate a conversational tone, while Woolf herself weaves and meanders through the various hallways of thought, opening doors along the way to allow the unique qualities of light contained in each room to spill out and mingle in the adjoining passageways. Without stating it explicitly – and by arguing, at times, a contrasting point of view — Woolf argues that the painter and writer are alike: they are both "continually driven by inadequacies in our understanding of the perceived world" and by the belief "that no art could

finally and completely solve these inadequacies" (Wrathall, "Phenomenological" 16). Indeed, Woolf's entire body of work dispels dualist myths dictating that artistic representation should separate the materiality of being from the internal rhythms of consciousness, and rather develops systems of thought and methods of writing that articulate the intervening, and at times fractured, spaces between humans and the world.

PART 1

Influence and Trajectories: From Significant Form to Signifying Obscurity

1.1 Shaping Phantoms: Fry, Woolf, and the Vagaries of Formalism

Woolf's prose engages with the materiality of experience, and her depictions of moments as they are lived and perceived speak to embodied encounters with space, time, and the non-human world. In focusing on the visual dimensions of scenes in which the characters' sensorial immersion in the world seems to pause the text, the aim of the study is to trace how Woolf's techniques create and echo the dynamic of intentionality, of a Being-in-the-world that suggests an underlying unity which is both fleeting and profound. To compare such segments of Woolf's prose to paintings is not to imply stasis or finality, but rather to explore how Woolf achieves sensorial depth by tracing interdisciplinary impulses in her work that stem from the reciprocal influences of the artists, writers, and theorists comprising the Bloomsbury Group. In this chapter, I outline the theoretical underpinnings of Post-Impressionism, in particular the theories developed by her close friend and fellow Bloomsberry Roger Fry, and the ways in which Woolf engaged with their possibilities in approaching her own literary style. Given the intellectual intimacy shared between Woolf and Fry in both their personal and professional lives, it cannot be surprising that Woolf's writing shows signs of Fry's early academic influences, such as the "Cambridge time philosophy" of Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore (Banfield, "Time Passes" 471). However, as Jane Goldman identifies, studies of both Woolf's and Vanessa Bell's aesthetic and particularly their "feminine sources" have more often than not been "subsumed under the rubric of the 'Bloomsbury aesthetic', itself largely assembled from the theories of Fry and Clive Bell" (*Feminist* 116). Therefore, my purpose follows the rationale that in providing a detailed backdrop of Fry's theories I might highlight the ways in which Woolf's methods utilize and ultimately expand beyond his approach to synthesizing art and life. Fry's insights on the theory of significant form, a construct that became one of the foundations for the Post-Impressionist movement, were especially of interest to Woolf. According to Fry, it was the goal of a painter to execute an image with a harmonious design that could be apprehended by the viewer instantaneously and without reliance upon a sentimental attachment to the subject nor to an underlying structure of symbolic meaning. Moreover, recognizing significant form in a painting would require an attitude by which the viewer would surmise and contemplate upon the artist's arrangement of colours, shapes, and textures rather than resort to predetermined interpretive

formulations. I argue that Woolf's prose can be read according to her interpretation and integration of this central Bloomsbury concept into a form of modernist realism that aligns closely with Merleau-Pontian views of intentionality. More specifically, I focus on how her fictional worlds are realized through descriptions that translate internal and external responses to the perceptual world into concrete occurrences of being. Woolf offers multiple creative solutions to representing the intangible aspects of experience, and, thereby, actualizes what Fry could only hypothesize: the intrinsic intercourse between significant form and lived experience, which for Woolf was expressed through her depictions of the implicit intentionality of her characters and their worlds.

1.1.1 Reality, Imagination, and the Significance of Form

A pervading concern for both Woolf and Fry, one that permeates their creative and intellectual pursuits throughout their careers, is the modernist challenge of defining and representing life as a dynamic reality in art. In her essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf discusses the difficulty of writing characters "that are real, true, and convincing" (21). She likens the process to the pursuit of a metaphysical apparition, a chase that in the end leaves the new generation of novelists, the Georgians, with only scraps of convention and fragments of out-dated wisdom handed down by the established Edwardian writers. Woolf repeatedly emphasizes in her essay that "to create characters which seem real" is a difficult and treacherous process (27). She argues that her contemporaries have no viable blueprint for constructing stories and that, therefore, the stories they do manage to create cannot be understood by the conventional collective mind: they are not driven by a schematic plot nor by a hierarchical and sentimentalized approach to realism. The new generation of novelists seeks to depict the ethereality of lived experience by at once exposing the superficiality of conventional literary methods and offering alternate forms that require a wholly responsive engagement on the part of the reader, who must "tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure" (39). The modern novelist must be content to stumble upon, rather than simply formulate constructions of reality. Furthermore, these designs must be "truthfully," if not always "beautifully," rendered, thereby opening up fictional worlds that have an "overwhelming fascination," not because they aspire

deliberately to the lofty heights of Milton, Keats, and Shakespeare, but because they are profoundly familiar to the "spirit we live by, life itself" (39).

Thus, Woolf's essay introduces an alternate method for writing character, one which she had already demonstrated in her fiction between the years 1917 and 1922. Her works in this period — most notably the self-published "A Mark on the Wall" (1917), and her first experimental novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922) — offer treatments of subjects, objects, spaces, and states of consciousness that enable an aesthetic rumination upon the possibilities of rupturing not just artistic but social conventions. Her much-quoted statement that "in or about December 1910, human character changed" ("Bennett" 26) leads into Woolf's considerations of divisive political structures lived through everyday events and material experiences. The "domestic tradition" with its "hierarchized, gendered, relations" is changed, however, and the "suffrage events of 1910 and the Post-Impressionist exhibition" of the same year inform Woolf's strategies (Goldman, *Feminist* 112). Fry's organization of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, titled *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, informs those strategies, based on his sense of "the departure from Impressionism by French-based artists" (124).[1] In light of the ideas that were propagated through the critical discourse surrounding his 1910 and 1912 exhibitions, as well as in his many essays and lectures, Fry was devoted to defining a phantom as elusive as Woolf's conception of character. While Jane Goldman has addressed the importance of colour on Woolf's work in relation to "earlier interpretations of Post-Impressionism" and "to the aesthetic practice of her sister Vanessa" (*Feminist* 123), I work from Fry's approach to the notion of significant form. Although it was Clive Bell who coined the term in his Post-Impressionist manifesto, *Art* (1914), it was Fry who addressed its ever-mutating theoretical implications for the duration of his life. The parallels that can be traced between Woolf's ideas about creating characters in fiction, in their "unlimited capacity and infinite variety," and Fry's propositions regarding significant form,

[1] The timing of Fry's first exhibition, which featured the works of artists who were considered to be the vanguard of the Post-Impressionist movement – Édouard Manet, Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse – was integral for introducing to the British public a new consciousness regarding artistic representational strategies. In *Roger Fry and the Beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism*, Jacqueline Falkenheim describes how "Manet was considered the father of the new art because of his revolutionary experimentation with formal conventions, such as simple linear designs and flat, unmodelled color, which allowed for the expression of what came to be considered the essential and permanent aspects of things," rather than simply depicting "the seemingly correct representation of the appearances of objects" (17).

reveal much about the impact these two thinkers had upon each other at a critical period in modernist thought ("Bennett" 39). As importantly, it can lead into a sense of Woolf's techniques as a form of representation that engages with the textures of lived experience through her approach to composition in depictions of a perceiving subject's shifting entanglement with the world.

Here, Pam Morris' discussion of Woolf's "worldly realism" is helpful for it lays theoretical ground for approaching Woolf's focus on the materiality of human and non-human existence, as well as the importance of the collective entwined with the individual, themes which Fry also pursued throughout his career (7). Morris's term suggests that in the perceptual world there is an equality, or what she calls a "horizontality," between "subjects and things," a condition, she argues, modernist writers are keen to represent in their fiction. Morris utilizes the thinking of Jaques Rancière to argue against the notion that "modernism marks a radical break with the foundational belief of realism that words can provide an account of the world" — an idea that has been misapplied to Woolf's arguments in "Modern Fiction" and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (5). Rancière argues instead that since the end of the eighteenth century realism had fallen under two categories, which can be termed "dissensual" and "consensual" (5). As Morris observes, the "terms 'consensus' and 'dissensus' are central to Rancière's thinking both on art and politics, which he sees as two facets of the same site of struggle, the struggle of representation" (5). For Rancière, consensus is any system of interpretation or representation governed by the reasoning of the "proper"; it "constitutes a naturalized artistic and political hierarchy in which everyone has a proper place which defines the terms and domain of their speech and action" (5). This definitive system of representation formulates a "façade of verisimilitude into a hierarchical totality comprising 'an affinity between characters, situations and forms of expression'" (5). Such an approach is indeed what Woolf was identifying in the works of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy — and what Fry was attempting to avoid in his conceptualizations of significant form.

The difficulty with any form of totalizing structure is that it is nearly impossible to argue against or disassemble. An example is Clive Bell's conception of the "aesthetic emotion" (*Art* 7), which is a crucial term in the early development of formalism and of interpretive systems emphasizing composition and design, but which nonetheless speaks to the drawbacks of a system that works towards a universal standard of value. Bell declares at the beginning of *Art* that

> [a]ll sensitive people agree that there is a peculiar emotion provoked by works of art [. . .]. This emotion is called the aesthetic emotion; and if we can discover some quality common and peculiar to all the objects that provoke it, we shall have solved what I take to be the central problem of aesthetics. We shall have discovered the essential quality in a work of art, the quality that distinguishes works of art from all other classes of objects. (7)

Throughout his text, Bell makes repeated attempts to define significant form and the aesthetic emotion that fuels it by laying out basic principles relating to composition, colour, and the artist's original conception of an image. For Bell, the aesthetic emotion results from a viewer's recognition in a work of art of "lines and colours combined in a particular way" as thus revealing the artist's inspired state. It results also from the viewer's "passionate apprehension of form" in the work's internal structures (8, 233). Essential, according to Bell, is that an image is composed as a cohesive whole so that a viewer may perceive its aesthetic merit through the harmonious integration of all its parts. Bell continues to argue that, conversely, "[f]orms that are not dictated by emotional necessity, forms that state facts, forms that are the consequences of a theory of draughtsmanship, imitations of natural objects or of the forms of other works of art, forms that exist merely to fill spaces – padding in fact – all these are worthless" (233). Bell insists that the job of the art critic is to be "continually pointing out these parts, or rather the combination, of which unite to produce significant form" (9). At the same time, he qualifies his claim by stating that it is impossible to describe or relate to another person the inherent qualities of a particular masterpiece; they must apprehend emotionally these qualities for themselves (9). These statements have prompted some theorists to identify a circular argument inherent in his thought. There also appears to be a contradiction at the base of his theories, as its "democratic appeal" vies with "an appeal to cultural elitism" (Goldman, *Feminist* 132). On one hand, it suggests that only a privileged mind with attuned senses might apprehend significant form; on the other hand, it seems to profess a kind of universality, that true and "genuine" works of art emit an aesthetic emotion that may be felt by specialists and lay people alike.

Bell's formulations of significant form were generatively provocative, but they also suggest a form of consensus, in Rancière's sense of the term, and are at the very least limited in scope and application — hence Fry's doubled response to the implications of Bell's thinking. Fry readily embraced Bell's aesthetic emotion because it helped to describe the unique feelings experienced by a viewer of a work of art when they recognize a masterful organization of formal

relations. At the same time, Fry challenged Bell's avoidance of applying the phrase to modes of representation other than painting. Fry believed it was possible, for instance, to experience the same level of aesthetic emotion from drawings or even graphic illustrations: "after all this kind of unity counts also for much in graphic art, and that when we admire a drawing our eye passes along the line appreciating at each point the perfect relation of each element in the curve to what preceded and to what follows it" ("Expression" 71). And though Fry was unwilling at this point to apply such an assessment to imagery produced solely for advertising purposes, by the end of his career he conceded that even posters might, in some cases, "'pass muster'" as works of aesthetic value (qtd. in Gordon 191).[2] In this light, I would suggest that without Fry's critique of Bell's "imperious claims for the hegemony of 'significant form'" (Green 23), there would not have been such a range of applications, with all their inconsistencies, offered by formalism to succeeding generations of critics.

Unlike Bell, Fry also believed it was possible for a reader of literature to experience aesthetic emotion in the comprehension of mental images evoked by the associations of language. This belief is evident in his high opinion of Woolf's writing. In a letter dated October 24, 1921, Fry writes, "your letter reduced me to a state of abject admiration of the Virginian style. I know quite well that this queer business of writing is quite as odd and peculiar as ours of putting paint on. It only looks like ordinary writing because we both use words but we use them quite differently and certainly I'm not taken in by the similarity" (*Letters* 515). In this passage, Fry reveals his desire to win Woolf's admiration and to share an insider's understanding of the creative process. And while he makes it clear that there is a difference between her "Virginian style" and his "ordinary" writing, he implies that only a true artist, someone who understands how "odd and peculiar" the creative process is, will recognize this difference. In an earlier letter marked July 27, 1920, Fry describes his ambivalence regarding the works of Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry, and then dons the role of a literary critic: "[T]here's hardly anyone else who seems to me to have any idea of what the essential texture of prose should be. Lots write

[2] Fry's thoughts on the aesthetic merit of advertising art shift quite dramatically by the end of his career, especially as more artists and establishments come onto the playing field of the art market, and as some of the more notable modern artists, like Paul Nash, began to experience increased financial gain from industry sectors that were interested in capitalizing on the recognition he received from leading avant-garde societies, such as the London Group and the Seven and Five Society.

well enough, but they don't create a new and personal medium as you do" (486). It is fitting that Fry uses aesthetic terms, such as "essential texture" and "personal medium," to articulate the importance of Woolf's writing, especially considering her intimacy with the visual arts, and emphasizes its status and composition.

Fry's understanding of significant form, then, establishes avenues by which Woolf could explore its applications to her distinct medium of expression and to her specific approach to embodied experience in prose. Woolf's representational techniques align with ephemeral, shifting, sensorially dense experiences, and resist totalizing systems, including systems of interpretation. In this sense, her approach to a modernist form of realism intersects with aspects of Ranciere's dissensual aesthetic, which becomes relevant to a reading of Fry's theories too. Morris argues that the "cracking apart" of the hierarchy of classical verisimilitude "requires a writing practice as dissensus," which "produces a redistribution of the perceptible, bringing into visibility and audibility all that had been excluded as unworthy, improper and of no account" (6). The inclusivity and materiality of this theory of representation means topics deemed improper, or at odds with one another, are brought into a communion which necessarily involves conflict and tension: an impulse towards unity that does not lead to a universal or stable state. For Woolf, as well as her sister, Vanessa Bell, this mode of dissensus played out in their commitment to rendering the specificities and shifting nature of the physical world encountered by the individual and their located perceptions. As Diane Gillespie argues, both Woolf and Bell put established patriarchal notions of reality into question, in part by continually searching for surprising ways of depicting the world around them. For Vanessa, as a painter, such experimentation meant creating with brush and paint an abstracted visual "world of related shapes, lines, colours, and textures, as well as angles of vision and degrees of representation" (Gillespie 227). Woolf's modes of composition included devising concrete images using the medium of language and arranging these images so that they may cohere gradually and indirectly into shifting rhythms and patterns through the process of reading. The potential experience for the reader is what Fry might call a transcendent state of contemplation: the carefully arranged elements on the page – words, syntax, simile, punctuation, tense, etc. – arouse emotions that "do not at once translate themselves into action, but are, as it were, dammed up and allowed to stagnate" ("Expression" 64). Rather than generating an immediate response from the reader cued by sentimental associations, the layered

images of the text involve a process of rumination and return that transforms slowly over time according to the layers of signification that accumulate over the course of the narrative.

Fry explores this idea of stagnation, or contemplative reading, by discussing Leo Tolstoy's theorization of the emotional significance of art. Fry paraphrases a section from Tolstoy's *What is Art* (1867) in which Tolstoy defines art as "the means of communicating emotion from one human being to another" ("Expression" 64). Here, Fry explains how Tolstoy describes the different ways emotion and intellect communicate an imagined scene to the reader:

> If, [Tolstoy] says, a boy is chased in the forest by a bear and escapes and comes to his village and says, 'I was chased by the bear and escaped,' that is a mere scientific statement of fact. But as he describes the shock of the sudden appearance of the bear, his terror at its ferocious approach, and the alternations of fear and hope as he fled, so as to arouse similar emotions in his hearers' breasts, that is already art. (63-64)

In this passage, Fry critiques Tolstoy's conclusion by suggesting that it "drag[s]" art "forcibly into the moral atmosphere of life" ("Expression" 64). He asserts instead that "[a]rt is the nature of play and is its own justification" (64). By this, he indicates that the essence of a piece of art, whether it be a painting or a work of prose fiction, does not arise from conventional or universal strategies through which feelings like terror, shock, or hope should be represented. Rather, if the work of art truly justifies itself, or is an "end in [itself]," then "[w]e should rest satisfied in the contemplation of [its] beauty and do nothing" (64). This sentiment resembles the tone of a statement Woolf makes in a letter to Fry: "'I meant nothing by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions – which they have done, one thinking it means one thing another another'" (qtd. in Shone, *Art* 12). By the time Woolf writes this letter in 1927, she is more tolerant than Fry of the various ways her readership might receive and interpret her fiction. However, she is still adamant that her own creative process should be devoid of intended "'symbolism'" (qtd. in Shone, *Art* 12). Her perspective on the production of a work of art still echoes the driving principle of the Bloomsbury Group from Fry's Post-Impressionist Exhibitions onward: that an artist's responsibility in the creation of art is to achieve formal harmony, not so it can be understood according to a reductive system of metaphors and symbols, but so it may be comprehended as a system of aesthetic relationships and associations.

One of Fry's most influential written works dealing with significant form and the importance of the aesthetic emotion in design is "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909), later reprinted as the first chapter in *Vision and Design* (1920). As Christine Froula points out, Clive Bell thought Fry's essay to be "the most valuable 'contribution to the science' since Kant," and she notes that regardless of the validity of Bell's assessment, "Kant's influence on Fry, Woolf, and the Bloomsbury aesthetics can hardly be overestimated" (14). (12). According to Froula, Kant's essential argument regarding artistic reception is that it is the process wherein a person judges the worth of an artwork through "disinterested contemplation" (12). This mode of aesthetic rumination is intended to free the viewer from personal "sentiment" and associations: "does it go with my couch? does it remind me of my honeymoon? will it appreciate in value? does owning it enhance my social status?" (12). The viewer who is wholly committed to the disinterested meditation of a work of art experiences a form of "pleasure" wholly generated by the comprehension of beautifully composed forms (12). In "An Essay in Aesthetics," Fry suggests such contemplation creates a separation between the unconscious experiences of the everyday, or what he calls the "actual," and the hyper-conscious engagement with the production and reception of a work of art, or the "imaginative" (18). The result is "the possibility of a double life [. . . I]n the imaginative life [. . .] the whole consciousness may be focussed upon the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience. In this way we get, in the imaginative life, a different set of values, and a different kind of perception" (18). This dissensual formulation gets to the core of Fry's understanding of significant form – his view of the relationship between experience and imagination – complete with all its implications and contradictions. The imaginative life establishes a distinct territory that may only be perceived by a mind devoted to the contemplation of aesthetic beauty. At the same time, that territory is equivalent to the phenomenal world and is reflected in the myriad details and surfaces of the everyday.

Beginning in his "An Essay in Aesthetics" and continuing through to his lectures surrounding the Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1912, Fry did in many ways seem to be working in the tradition of Kant. His theories created a distinct separation between "pure form" and "associated ideas," which, according to Christopher Green, had multiple ramifications: "Looking at art was removed into a quasi-sacred region of contemplation, separated from 'practical life.' It required complete detachment from the arena of life emotions – horror, pity. It required what Fry called a 'disinterested,' even 'inhuman,' state of mind. Further, the distinction implied the

possibility of an art of nothing but 'pure form,' a 'visual music,' as he put it in 1912" (20-21). Interestingly, as both Froula and Christopher Reed observe, this process of clearing one's aesthetic judgment of personal sentiment seemingly encourages an individual to seek the universal in order to experience what Immanuel Kant considers humanity's "'highest end,' in line with the Enlightenment sociopolitical ideal, the 'right to go visiting'" (qtd. in Froula 12-13). It is a kind of freedom that requires or demands an escape from personal prejudices and sentiments, or one's "'thick little ego,'" as Bell put it (qtd. in Froula 13). Here is where we begin to touch on Fry's broader vision: the idea that the transcendent emotional experience one could access in the contemplation of a work of art had the power to open up a world unfettered both by tradition and by what Fry calls the "'incurable optimism of memory'" (qtd. in Reed 56). As he writes in *Vision and Design*, "beauty is not the nostalgic pleasure" we experience when we conflate the physical artifacts of the past with a sentimental world view born out of the "boredoms, the snobberies, the cruel repressions, the mean calculations and the rapacious speculations of the mid-nineteenth century" (43). In other words, Fry's debt to Kant is seen as much in his sociopolitical initiatives as in his aim to educate the wider public about Post-Impressionist art. His lectures and written works on significant form, the aesthetic emotion, and the cultural importance of art history were part of a larger campaign to change people's everyday perceptions, thoughts, attitudes and behaviours (Reed 58).

These sensibilities have their beginnings in the Post-Impressionist movement, and in Fry's exhibitions of 1910 and 1912. This unique succession of events stands out in twentieth-century art history, perhaps more than any authoritative text or written manifesto, because the paradigm it created cannot be attributed to any one pattern or source. The variety and the contradictions at the heart of the movement were the source of both its impact and its challenge to viewers. As Reed points out:

> Post-Impressionism was supposed to express the artist's personal emotion, and, at the same time, to communicate a universal mental concept. The new art did not 'attempt to represent what the eye perceives' in the look of objects, yet it claimed to be 'rendering their real significance.' Finally, the new art was 'modern,' 'Post-Impressionist' [. . .] the product of avant-garde artists 'pushing their ideas further and further'; at the same time, it was 'a return to primitive, even perhaps [. . .] a return to barbaric art.' Personal and

> universal, unrealistic and real, advanced and primitive – the paradoxes of Post-Impressionism were seized upon by the critical press. (50-51)

For Fry, the exhibition of 1910 was a bold attempt to introduce a more contemporary French art to the London art world, and the art-going public was outraged by what they perceived as the "vulgarity and lack of technical skill present in the works of these artists" (Falkenheim 20). They were also disconcerted by the artists' apparent desertion of time-honoured traditions to embrace what seemed to be sub-standard aesthetic sensibilities. For instance, a writer for the *Connoisseur* wrote that the Post-Impressionists "have discarded the accepted tenets of art as resulting in work too subtle and complicated to arouse the emotions and have gone back to the most simple and primitive forms of expression, those of children and savage races" (qtd. in Falkenheim 21). Understandably, art enthusiasts demanded justification for the creation of art that seemed to move backward instead of forward. They may also have been concerned that their sensibilities, as refined as they might have seemed, were unequipped to deal with the transformative vision of the new generation of artists. Indeed, the immediate backlash against what appeared to be the avant-garde elitism of Fry's exhibitions might have overwhelmed the movement if Fry had not so tirelessly met the criticism both in lectures and in print.

It seems evident that Fry was cognizant of the potential consequences involved in promoting art that purposely flew in the face of established taste in London. In this light, the importance of the public's vehement reaction to the 1910 show was the role it had in instigating a new critical discourse. Skeptics and proponents alike developed constructive ways to clarify their ideas in written tracts and public debates. But as Falkenheim points out, "Fry was, of course, the major spokesman. He himself had discovered the young French artists only a few years before"; for this reason, the transformations in Fry's critical thinking between the two exhibitions "were crucial elements in the development of his formalist ideas" (15). When the "Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition" opened in October 1912, Fry's focus had shifted from the older generation of painters, who saw Manet as their guide, to an emphasis on the younger talent, such as Picasso and Matisse, as well as emerging English artists, including Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Stanley Spencer, to name a few. For this new generation of English painters, Fry was their devoted networker: he took them to Turkey and Italy, where he exposed them to Byzantine mosaics, and he arranged studio visits in Paris. He was also a champion of their avant-garde aesthetics and methods and was in turn respected and admired for his analytical talents. Richard

Shone writes that Bell and Grant were particularly enamoured by his theories and considered him to be a "lucid, suggestive writer" (*Art of Bloomsbury* 16). Indeed, Fry's critical stance surrounding the second Post-Impressionist show was less concerned about rebelling against the past or generating shock and more focused on clarifying and cementing a valid aesthetic sensibility, significant form, for the British art consciousness; a sensibility that responds to the immediate reality established by the artist's configuration of colours, textures, and planes rather than by preconceived formulations of the perceived subject. For instance, in his Preface to the catalogue of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, Fry asserts that

> these artists do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form, not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life. By that I mean that they wish to make images which by the clearness of their logical structure, and by their closely-knit unity of texture, shall appeal to our disinterested and contemplative imagination with something of the same vividness as the things of actual life appeal to our practical activities. In fact they aim not at illusion but at reality. (Vision 239)

Fry emphasizes that the artist's creation has an impact through the viewer's contemplation of its unique organization of visual elements, as in Picasso's cubist language of planes and forms and Matisse's spare visual rhythms and spatial relations. This contemplation suggests a new or an alternate reality, which may have the same effect upon the world of the imagination as the objects of the phenomenal world have upon our everyday experiences. Here we see the importance of Fry publishing his essay a year before the first Post-Impressionist exhibition: it helped to prepare the ground for the cultivation of a language of aesthetics, not only for the inner circle of Bloomsbury but also for the art-conscious public from all sectors of London society.

Fry's theoretical contributions and insights in the two years between the 1910 and 1912 exhibitions caused a dramatic change in the general attitude towards Post-Impressionist art. Within a year following the 1912 show, it became widely accepted as the "most recent means of artistic expression; and particularly as an ideology, it was invoked to explain multiple aesthetic experiences besides those of painting and sculpture" (Falkenheim 29). It is not surprising, therefore, that by the time Virginia and Leonard Woolf establish the Hogarth Press and publish Virginia's "The Mark on the Wall," Fry's theories were firmly cemented in the minds of the

Bloomsbury group. Indeed, in "The Mark on the Wall," Woolf's technique meshes with Fry's framework in complex ways. She explores depictions of memory and time that fluctuate between highly descriptive prose and more abstract statements on themes such as perception, death, and the afterlife. All of these reflections in the story lead tangentially to the realization enunciated by the narrator: "Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail" (10). In this sense, Woolf's experiment actualizes Fry's theorization of significant form. The narrative voice moves back and forth between omniscient and first-person points of view as it questions its own attempts to ascertain the nature of reality, but its reflections do nothing to contextualize the importance of recognizing and labelling the mark as a snail. Rather, the final realization is but one element that serves to create the overall shape of the sensorial encounter with the mark and to highlight that the story as a whole is designed to be apprehended as a periphrastic formation of physical phenomena and thought. As Morris argues, this "understanding of two, often conflicting forces shaping the comprehension of reality plays a key role" in all of Woolf's prose (11). Throughout the story, the narrator asserts that one moment does not flow into another. Each moment is separate and cannot necessarily be understood in relation to the moments that precede it. This makes the significance of life impossible to grasp unless we are willing, as the narrator suggests, to "catch hold of the first idea that passes" (5). In other words, life is presented as a broader web of associative and dissociative elements, each one triggering multiple psychological trajectories. The narrative voice is prompted by the immediate physical world, but the impressions of that world, which centre around the mark on the wall like a psychic vortex, continually transform in relation to specific memories, fantasies, and philosophical quandaries. Here we can see as well how Woolf presents a story wherein these two modes of perception are synthesized into a whole that allows for fractures and seams — a version of Fry's understanding of the imaginative and the actual.

One of the more effective and multifaceted metaphors representing the relationship between the imaginative and sensory life, and which is utilized in both "The Mark on the Wall" and "An Essay in Aesthetics," is the mirror reflection. "[I]n the mirror," Fry suggests,

> it is easier to abstract ourselves completely, and look upon the changing scene as a whole. It then, at once, takes on the visionary quality, and we become true spectators, not selecting what we will see, but seeing everything equally, and thereby we come to notice a number of appearances and relations of appearances, which would have escaped our

> notice before, owing to that perceptual economizing by selection of what impressions we will assimilate, which in life we perform by unconscious processes. (20)

For Fry, the action of gazing into a mirror is a necessary process for the artist to embark upon; it is a process centred on an "abstraction" that is distinguished from the "unconscious" immediacy of life. The experience of abstraction enables the artist to engage completely with "appearances and relations of appearances" in order to become a "true" spectator whose perceptions both determine and are shaped by this altered perspective ("Aesthetics" 20). The result is a circuitous vision created not by any causal nor hierarchal system of meaning but rather by the subtle inference of multiple impressions and associations.

In "The Mark on the Wall," Woolf invokes the mirror metaphor to suggest that the otherness of the reflected world has just as much, if not more, validity than our accepted phenomenal world. While the majority of the story resides in the imaginative spheres of memory, playful fantasy, and philosophical meditation, halfway through this all-encompassing internal plot, the narrator reveals that she is continually engaged in a "dressing up" or a hyper-conscious re-figuring of the "image" she has of herself:

> Indeed, it is curious how instinctively one protects the image of oneself from idolatry or any other handling that could make it look ridiculous, or too unlike the original to be believed in any longer. Or is it not so very curious after all? It is a matter of great importance. Suppose the looking-glass smashes, the image disappears, and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people. (85)

When Woolf introduces the mirror metaphor, the narrative lens goes temporarily out of focus, and the reader is made starkly aware of the inherent otherness of the story; a seemingly unaccountable significance has been given to a world of reflections and fanciful concoctions. Woolf's narrator continues to qualify her assertion, but not by giving it any empirical or rational justification:

> As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. And the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more

> and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted, as the Greeks did and Shakespeare perhaps. (85-86)

Similar to the way in which "An Essay in Aesthetics" prepares the theoretical ground for Fry's 1910 exhibition, this passage introduces Woolf's readership to the "phantoms" she will continue to attempt to render, and it represents a crucial enunciation of her materialist leanings. As Ariane L. Mildenberg argues, the "point of [Woolf's] imaginary variations in this story is not to hit a final 'mark' or to make a point, as it were, of the actual object, but rather to 'restor[e] wonder to the object,' in the words of Judith Butler, to uncover 'the thatness of the thing . . . that it is possible at all'" (59). In both her short story and her 1923 essay, Woolf stresses that there is not simply one reality, nor is there one mode of depicting character. Rather, life and character are represented through myriad reflections and "capable of appearing in any place; wearing any dress; saying anything and doing heaven knows what" ("Bennett" 39). This vision promotes an unbounded potential for the creation of character and indeed the depiction of embodied experience, and reflects a period in the arts that is still defined today by its unwavering commitment to investigation and experimentation.

1.1.2 Innovation, Rationalism, and Phenomenology

The period of rigorous creative exploration in the arts after 1912 cultivated the ground for a range of inconsistencies in Fry's aesthetics and "a certain restlessness and tendency to secede from societies to which he belonged and to found others, each to be abandoned in its turn" (Woolf, *RF* 86). Woolf explains that "Fry did not regret it; he was often to maintain that it is only by changing one's mind that one can avoid the prime danger of becoming either a fossil or a figurehead" (86). Ironically, Fry's tendency to resist complete fidelity to his theories resulted in a lifelong preoccupation: the attempt to marry the theoretical aspects of significant form with the more observable elements of the perceptual world. Fry was unable to put all of his faith, as Clive Bell would seem to do, in the primacy of the aesthetic emotion; he did not believe it could stand on its own, but rather that art derived its meaning also from the more concrete and observable elements of lived experience: "Why [. . .] must a painter begin by abandoning himself to the love of God or man or Nature unless it is that in all art there is a fusion of something in order that form may become significant?" (qtd. in Green 22-23). Fry's questioning of the role or function of

artistic form cannot be dissociated from his consistent adherence to a scientific method, in which theory is contingent and subject to change according to the evidence that grounds it. Thus, in "Expression and Representation in the Graphic Arts" Fry states:

> I am afraid that my attitude to aesthetics is essentially a practical and empirical one. I go about the world continually looking at works of art, endeavouring to train myself to appreciate them and using the faculty of appreciation thus developed to test their relative values. In carrying out this work of comparison I find myself obliged from time to time to sum up my results in a theory of aesthetics which I always regard as provisional and of the nature of a scientific hypothesis, to be held until some new phenomenon arises which demands that the terms of the theory shall be revised so as to include it. (61)

One example of Fry's "provisional" style of criticism is his handling of the debates surrounding the value of abstraction as distinct from the value of realism. The central issue for Fry, as Reed asserts, "is not that abstract art is always better, it is that abstraction is appropriate now. The rules of realism – what Fry terms 'the too elaborate pictorial apparatus which the Renaissance established' – were, in their day, devised 'with passionate zest and enthusiasm.' By the nineteenth century, however, they had become a 'corpus of dead fact, alien to the imagination'" (51). According to Fry, artists such as Cézanne, Manet, and Georges Seurat moved from operating under "'the science of representation'" to "'the science of expressive design'" (qtd. in Reed 51). He understood this shift as part of an inevitable and necessary historical process, in which aesthetic paradigms repeatedly decline into obscurity and are then reiterated in succeeding periods of culture. Consequently, in each "'turn of the great wheel of history,'" the collective consciousness both acquires and relinquishes expressive modes and possibilities (qtd. in Reed 51).

Although Fry's theoretical approach to the provisionality of artistic value was unique for early twentieth-century art criticism – especially considering the uncompromising tone of works such as Bell's *Art* – it was not born in a vacuum. Green explains that "Fry's passionate rationalism identifies him with a very particular mentality produced inside a very particular, distinctly enclosed intellectual milieu in England at the end of the 1880s: the Cambridge Conversazione Society, better known as the Society of Apostles" (15). Fry was initiated into this highly exclusive set of Cambridge thinkers in 1885, and even at that early stage, he was determined to find a way to unite his growing passion for painting with an academic career. Thus,

while "dissecting in the Laboratory" at Cambridge, he was also "painting the male nude under the direction of the Slade professor" (*RF* 60). The most notable relationship he fostered within the group was with J.E. McTaggart,[3] however, their connection was primarily defined by contrasting philosophical stances. As Green explains, "McTaggart's intellectual leadership of this tiny circle was marked by his own transition from the radical materialism of John Stuart Mill to Hegel at his most idealist" (15). From the start, Fry steered clear of McTaggart's Hegelian metaphysics, which focused on what he considered to be abstract absolutes; instead, he was drawn to methods that valued "concrete 'appearance'" (qtd. in Green 15). This empirical leaning led Fry to take the natural sciences course at Cambridge. In one of his early essays he writes of the importance of physical realities even in the pursuit of abstracts or universals: "For the fact that the absolute is expressed through the phenomenal must have meaning and therefore if the absolute itself be worthy of our respect are we not right in seeing it in phenomenological manifestations?" (qtd. in Green 15). This view led him to submit two fellowship dissertations, both of which were declined by his committee. The second of Fry's proposals was an attempt to marry art and science and was titled "On the Laws of Phenomenology and their Application to Greek Painting." Fry defined the term phenomenology as "the science of appearances," which distances his thinking from the more metaphysically driven philosophy of nineteenth-century phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl (qtd. in Green 15). Husserl's phenomenological premise is that the subjects of the physical world may be understood in their "essential form" through a conjoining of the subjective and objective aspects of consciousness (Drucker, *Visible* 35). Although the majority of Fry's aesthetics diverge from Husserl's focus on synthesis, they do converge in their rejection of idealistic presuppositions and in their focus on "systems of knowledge" based on the observable phenomena of experience (Sinha 562). For instance, Fry outwardly claimed to apply nineteeth-century positivism to his theories, which, like Husserl's phenomenology, emphasizes the "sense-

[3] Their friendship can be traced back to Clifton, where Fry was first challenged to reconcile his Quaker background with a more liberal academic atmosphere, and where he was particularly affected by McTaggart's atheism. Woolf writes that "though McTaggart carefully avoided certain subjects, and was 'delicately scrupulous never to let me feel my own inferiority,' he was stimulating him. He was making him think for himself and suggesting the possibility of asking innumerable questions about things hitherto unquestionable" (*RF* 40).

given" in the interpretation of knowledge (562).[4] Johanna Drucker suggests that "[i]n a very general sense, the formalist methodology of art historical practice, any methodology which does not proceed from an iconographical or social analysis, has to some extent been premised on phenomenology" (VI 36). In this light, she argues that both Bell and Fry were to a certain degree working from a "phenomenological basis without acknowledgement" because they separate the examination of the formal elements of a "visual object" from its historical and social context (36).

One of the more relevant phenomenological theories for the Post-Impressionist movement is the existentialist understanding of intentionality. From 1905 onward, "Husserl analyzed the peculiar structure belonging to the consciousness of 'inner' time, in which all noematic entities arise within a temporal horizon," and are composed of "'protentions'" – anticipatory, yet "non-thematic," inklings of experiences yet to be encountered – and "'retentions'" or non-thematic experiential residues of the immediate past (Crowell 23). This temporal construction of intentionality, along with its language and terms, set the stage for later philosophers, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to expand upon its applications. For instance, a significant ramification of Husserl's idea of protention and retention for perception is what Merleau-Ponty refers to as "voyance" or "seeing farther" (qtd. in Carbone 3). Mauro Carbone explains that this "'the voyance consists in seeing 'farther than one sees,' in showing us the invisible as the 'outline and the depth of the visible'" (3). The concept of the voyance helped Merleau-Ponty to understand perception, particularly as it relates to artistic production and reception, as a kind of occurrence that presents as real what had hitherto been understood only as traces of the recent past. This inbuilt capacity to see farther enables the seer to merge the intellectual and sensory aspects of perception into an eidetic/kinaesthetic encounter with phenomena.

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[4] "Husserl's phenomenology is preceded by the tradition of empiricism and positivism. But the distinction between the two schools is chiefly determined by the interpretation of the 'given.' Even the Husserlian 'principle of all principles' as such does not make clear as to what is to be considered as immediately given or intuited at first hand. The given may range from the barely sense-given, i.e., the data of sensuous intuition, to the highest possibility of the ideal generalities of thought [. . .] . Negatively speaking, phenomenology shares in common the radical tradition of the empiricist of not accepting ideal constructions or metaphysical presuppositions or theories – beyond the elements of the given. But the 'given' has a far wider scope for the phenomenologist than for the positivist" (Sinha 563).

Of course, just as Fry's theories are inconsistent throughout his career, so are the parallels between Husserlian phenomenology and early formalism. Falkenheim writes that "Fry has often been taken to task for trying to separate form from content in painting" (90). She suggests this criticism may not be completely fair since Fry does make numerous attempts in his essays and lectures to synthesize the empirical and intellectual spheres of the creative process. For instance, many of the passages in his influential text, *Cézanne: a Study of His Development* (1927), eloquently describe Cézanne's ability to transcribe the material details of the perceptual world into an aesthetic form that is at once accurately described and profoundly personal (90). At the same time, Fry often has difficulty explaining how form and content merge and assemble into a clarifying whole. At the end of *Vision and Design*, he concedes that it may be impossible to accurately describe how the artist translates their reception of the world into a meaningful work of art, or even what makes a work impactful:

> I think we are all agreed that we mean by significant form something other than agreeable arrangements of form, harmonious patterns, and the like. We feel that a work which possesses it is the outcome of an endeavour to express an idea rather than to create a pleasing object. Personally, at least, I always feel that it implies the effort on the part of the artist to bend to our emotional understanding by means of his passionate conviction some intractable material which is alien to our spirit. I seem unable at the present to get beyond this vague adumbration of the nature of significant form [. . .]. Any attempt I might make to explain this would probably land me in the depths of mysticism. On the edge of that gulf I stop. (302)

Although it was difficult for Fry to articulate in words this "vague" territory where the natural world overlaps with the internal world of the artist, he was a persistent supporter of artists, including Cézanne and Seurat, who he believed expressed this "intractable material" through the application of paint on canvas (302). For both Cézanne and Seurat, painting was a means by which to convey a special internalized knowledge, a "visual truth," that is wholly derived neither from a carefully rendered record of physical phenomena nor from a subjective "romantic expression"; rather, it arises from an imperceptible unfolding of a reality "correspond[ing] to an essential quality evoked in the unity of the pictorial composition" (qtd. in Drucker, *Theorizing* 38, 38, 44). Fry believed this "essential quality" was at once "grounded in nature" and in the "very activity of seeing," which constitutes, in Drucker's words, a creative "laboratory of

productive investigation and experiment," an artist space that nurtures the application of the hallmarks of scientific inquiry (38).

Fry tended to favour painting over other art forms, but his appreciation of Woolf's ability as a writer to achieve a striking relationship between content and form stems in part from his recognition that she was applying a rigorous method of observation to the subjects in her prose. In "Solid Objects" (1920), for example, Woolf builds a plot around an English politician's obsession with collecting everyday objects. When he spies a piece of sea glass while walking along a sea-shore, much like a geologist encountering a rare gem, he carefully observes its size, shape, and the effect of the sun upon its surface: "When the sand coating was wiped off, a green tint appeared. It was a lump of glass, so thick as to be almost opaque; the smoothing of the sea had completely worn off any edge or shape. [. . .] The green thinned and thickened slightly as it was held against the sky or against the body" (55). In this short prose experiment, Woolf is exploring what Cézanne called "the truth of seeing" (qtd. in Drucker, *Theorizing* 42), an activity conducted within the boundaries of the work of art, which was for Cézanne the "limited parameters of the canvas" (Drucker, *Theorizing* 38), and for Woolf the constraints of language and text. Such limited creative parameters enable the artist to generate a self-contained universe of associations that overlap and are layered upon each other. It is a phenomenon evident in "The Mark on the Wall," wherein the narrator reflects upon a wide array of elements — physical phenomena (the fireplace, the cigarette smoke, the furniture, the tree tapping on the window pane); internal fantasies (being "blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour" and "groping" at the "toes of Giants"); and philosophical musings (the smashing "looking-glass" and the "collision with reality" that results from seeing the world through new eyes) — all in the process of observing an nondescript mark on the wall (4, 6). The story as a whole is a compressed moment of remembered time, conjuring multiple possibilities in a dissensus of thought and perception. Similarly, in "Solid Objects," the piece of sea glass becomes, like the mark, a kind of focal point that anchors the narrator's reflections upon the more ephemeral elements of lived experience:

> The lump of glass had its place upon the mantlepiece, where it stood heavy upon a little pile of bills and letters, and served not only as an excellent paper-weight, but also as a natural stopping place for the young man's eyes when they wandered from his book. Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and

> recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it. (56)

In the enclosed space of Woolf's story, objects and experiences that would generally be passed by unperceived become focal. The carefully represented world of Woolf's text establishes a parallel reality that brings into sharper focus the aspects of living that cannot be wholly apprehended by the consciousness nor by the sensory organs. Unsurprisingly, the story presages the new materialist ideas of contemporary thinkers such as Bill Brown, who asserts that "objects mediate our sense of ourselves, as individuals and as collectives, and our sense of others" ("Materialism" 62). Woolf's observed space reveals questions that hitherto would not have been apparent. For instance, as John observes the "contrast between the china so vivid and alert, and the glass so mute and contemplative. [. . .] he asked himself how the two came to exist in the same world, let alone stand upon the same narrow strip of marble in the same room. The question remained unanswered" ("Solid" 57). John's quandary establishes a relationship between the "china," the "glass," and the "stuff of thought," and in doing so transforms the grey zone between thought and sensory perception into a concrete object of contemplation (57,56).

As Woolf's early fiction exemplifies, Fry's "legacy" to modernism in the arts and literature is largely based on the ensuing commitment to the "object status of the pictorial image" (Drucker, *Theorizing* 76). But Fry's interests were more expansive, as seen in his persistent efforts to find the connecting strands between the aesthetic emotion and lived experience, as well as between the "harmonious patterns" of a work of art and the psychological currents "alien to our spirit" they invoke (Fry, *Vision* 302). And although Fry never fully embraced any established metaphysical branch of knowledge, he did, along with Woolf, acknowledge the Cambridge scholars, Bertrand Russell and G.E Moore, whom Fry believed had developed "a real metaphysic based on fundamental ideas about mathematics – a humble, unpretentious metaphysic with the same solidity as other sciences" (qtd. in Green 16). In particular, for both Woolf and Fry, Russell's and Moore's understanding of time and perception offered a viable bridge between lived experience and the abstracted elements of a work of art. As Ann Banfield argues, the "Cambridge time philosophy" ("Time Passes" 471) meshed with Woolf's engagement with the ideas of Post-Impressionism and thus influenced the author's development of narrative form that expanded upon the single descriptive moments developed in her shorter fiction.

According to Banfield, Woolf's experimentations with longer prose structures utilized the mathematical theory of "continuity," which led her to construct a "novel out of short stories" ("Time Passes" 476). The theory of continuity works under the assumption that physical time is as real as conceptual time:

> Time really passes, but abstractly and objectively. It is Russell's acceptance of both sides of the dualism as real which permits Woolf to incorporate a literary impressionism into a form which does not stop with impressionism. It is the conception of real time as physical time [. . .] that provides her with a temporal counterpart to Fry's Post-Impressionist spatial design. (479)

Essentially, the idea of continuity merges the conceptual and the physical aspects of temporality into static moments of being. In Woolf's writing, particularly her earlier short stories, these moments hold a self-contained universe of impressions and associations. For example, in her unpublished short story, "The Evening Party," she creates a scene as a visual artist might construct a mixed-media collage through the layering and splicing of images, both transparent and opaque:

> Something has dissolved my face. Through the mist of silver candle light it scarcely appears. People pass me without seeing me. They have faces. In their faces the stars seem to shine through rose coloured flesh. The room is full of vivid yet unsubstantial figures; they stand upright before shelves striped with innumerable little volumes; their heads and shoulders blot the corners of square golden picture frames; and the bulk of their bodies, smooth like stone statues, is massed against something grey, tumultuous, shining too as if with water beyond the uncurtained windows. (96-97)

In her descriptions of the material world encountered and presented through the eyes of the perceiving subject, Woolf juxtaposes pattern ("shelves striped with innumerable little volumes") and texture ("smooth like stone statues") in the same way that a painter might utilize various applications of paint to create an overall rhythm across a canvas. The varying sentence lengths add their own rhythms. In these ways, there is an economizing in the amount of descriptive detail needed to render the scene. Much like how the viewer of a painting recognizes and responds to its significant form, the complexities of the narrator's impressions cohere in shifting patterns according to the associations which the images depicted share with each other.

At this relatively early stage in writing prose fiction, Woolf incorporated Russell's understanding of real and physical time with Fry's aesthetic theories, exemplifying in her prose a transformation that Fry believed Cézanne's paintings signified: a move "'from the complexity of the appearance of things' revealed by Impressionism's analyses of the 'whole continuum of sensation' [. . .] 'to the geometric simplicity which design demands'" (qtd. in Banfield 484). This mode of consolidation is seen in another experimental work, "Sympathy" (1921), where Woolf juxtaposes various rhythms of light and shadow, the conflicting sensations of a city street, and a clock striking twelve:

> The sycamore shakes its leaves stirring flakes of light in the deep pool of air in which it stands; the sun shoots straight between the leaves to the grass; the geraniums glow red in the earth. A cry starts to the left of me, and another, abrupt and dissevered, to the right. Wheels strike divergently; omnibuses conglomerate in conflict; the clock asseverates with twelve distinct strokes that it is midday (110)

Here the movement of time is represented as a pattern of sound harmoniously arranged with the perceptual rhythms of the scene. Every sensation seems to be happening simultaneously, an effect which is heightened by the use of alliteration ("stirring," "stands," "strike," "strokes") and assonance ("shakes," "flakes," "asseverates") which link the component parts of the passage (110). The effect is overlapping and seemingly instantaneous, an experience similar to that whereby a viewer of visual art "grasps at once," as Fry asserts, "the relations of each division to the whole interwoven pattern of forms" ("Expression" 71). Fry calls this mode of reception "immediate" unity, a term he uses to distinguish the "graphic arts" from music, poetry, and prose fiction (71). Indeed, Woolf's experimental style in these selected examples exemplifies how the medium of writing has the capacity to represent an ephemeral moment of lived experience as an intuitively organized and discursively presented whole, not simply as a succession of events to be reflected upon after the final page has been turned.

Woolf's capacity to respond to a range of theoretical and stylistic applications in her writing is evident in her ongoing modifications and innovations, particularly as they relate to developments in visual art and philosophical thought within the interdisciplinary context of Bloomsbury. Woolf viewed Fry's theories as arising from a similar breadth. At the end of her biography, she writes that "[t]he critic of Roger Fry as a man has a far harder task than any that was set him by the pictures of Cézanne [. . .]. He changed the taste of his time by his writing,

altered the current of English painting by his championship of the Post-Impressionists, and increased immeasurably the love of art by his lectures. He left too upon the minds of those who knew him a very rich, complex and definite impression" (294). Indeed, while surely influenced by Woolf, Fry's own influence upon her writing is apparent throughout her career. In her experimental short stories and in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf treats her characters and subjects as a painter does the elements on a canvas, layering and juxtaposing to create a dissensual aesthetic enabling the reader to apprehend the scenes as vividly rendered moments in time. As this study moves forward, I investigate how Woolf moves from Fry's theories to explore multiple fields of representation that communicate through the diffusive transitions of perception, memory, and intentionality. Her works exemplify throughout her oeuvre the claim Brown makes in "The Matter of Materialism": that "literary texts register the material world, at times in excess of any agenda of representation, and [. . .] disclose aspects of the material life, present and past, that are unlocatable in other archives" (60). In my next chapter, I explore how Woolf's intimacy with her sister, Vanessa Bell, and her engagement with the visual arts illustrates her lifelong devotion to understanding the elusive phantom of creative expression of embodied experience, and how the intersections between the visual and literary arts enable representations of the phenomenal world that are at once generative and diffusive, and that allow space for both the consensual and incongruous materialities of being.

1.2 Collaborating Rhythms: Woolf, Bell, and the Phenomenology of Style

Virginia Woolf's sustained involvement with the lives and practices of the Bloomsbury artists – and in particular, the intellectual connection she maintained with Roger Fry and the artistic camaraderie/rivalry she shared with her sister, Vanessa Bell – fueled their and her own creativity. As Jane Goldman notes, "Woolf constantly draws parallels between writing and painting," and Vanessa not only "drew considerable inspiration from her sister," but also inspired Woolf's literary depictions of her sensory responses to the world (*Feminist* 149).[1] Her deep familiarity with the visual arts is reflected in Woolf's consciousness of her daily surroundings and of the psychic effects external stimuli had upon her imagination, as represented in the many essays and diary entries in which Woolf writes about the panopticon power of sensorial imagery. It also provided perspective on both the possibilities and limitations involved in representing lived experience and of depicting the entanglement of the immediate moment. In so many scenes from her texts, images are "marked" upon the "maps" of the "visible world" and the world of action, which are, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty asserts, "total parts of the same Being" ("Eye" 124). Her experiments with family photo albums, her essays on Walter Sickert and other painters, and her reflections on the cinema informed Woolf's perceptual and, as I assert, phenomenological approach to writing, particularly in the interdisciplinary collaboration with Bell on *Kew Gardens* (1927). Experiences with the visual arts through her sister's work and the different modernist disciplines of the Bloomsbury Group were integral to her development of a form of prose fiction that weaves together the patterns of the mind and of the senses to create a divergent field of signs and relations. Woolf's advocacy for an engagement with lived experience echoes Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of "phenomenological description," which aims to "help us recognize how things are constituted and available for us without needing to be constituted by us in thought" (Wrathall, "Existential" 34). Woolf's descriptions of life, which pulsate with the

[1] Diane Gillespie, Jane Dunn, and Liliane Louvel have indicated that, especially in the early years of her career, Woolf continually tested "'how (and whether) she could write as a painter would paint. [. . .] She went to the Omega shows and tried to make up her mind about the paintings under the barrage of Roger Fry's opinions. She listened to him talking about Cézanne to Clive and compared her own responses to the famous apples. She set her aesthetics against Fry's, when he wrote to praise her for 'The Mark on the Wall': 'I'm not sure that a perverted plastic sense doesn't somehow work itself in words for me'" (qtd. in Louvel 3).

rhythms of a body in a reciprocal involvement with the external world, are as much the result of her hands-on experience with visual art mediums and Vanessa's practice as her understanding of Post-Impressionist aesthetic theories. Therefore examining the artistic exchanges she had with Vanessa reveals a a rhythmic "structure [. . .] through which a common vision arises as expression" (Wiskus 120) — a pattern of professional and personal articulations and divisions that can be understood as both an embracive and diffusive shape of creative production.

Woolf's distinctively visual and phenomenological understanding of the perceptual world was largely due to a lifetime of training her sensory faculties, as would a painter or a photographer. As Diane Gillespie argues, "[v]isual images and scenes rescued [Woolf] and her characters when words proved inadequate to define human relationships or individual lives [. . .] they made her see more vividly, or they stopped words for her and returned them to her afresh" (63). Her upbringing was rooted in creative development, exploration, and collaboration. For instance, drawing, along with reading and writing, were pastimes shared by all the members of the Stephen family.[2] The surviving sketches made by Virginia are most often of human heads copied from the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti or William Blake. Her renderings are lightly drawn with tentative pencil strokes (Gillespie figs. 1.2;1.3;1.4;1.5); however, they suggest an eye for detail and a natural understanding of proportion. Even by 1904, when the realm of the visual arts was Vanessa's well-tilled ground, Virginia was quite earnest in acquiring mastery over her drafting skills. During this time, being in her early twenties and already publishing professionally, she writes to Violet Dickinson:

> If Haldane is severe, I shall give up literature and take to art, I am already a draughtsman of great promise. I draw for 2 hours every evening after diner, and make copies of all kinds of pictures, which Nessa says shows a very remarkable feeling for line. Pictures are easier to understand than subtle literature, so I think I shall become an artist to the public, and keep my writing to myself. I am probably the only living person who can understand it. Bold politicians can't. (*Flight* 170)

[2] In a letter to Violet Dickinson, Virginia reports that the family "still drew after dinner. Vanessa apparently sometimes read, while Virginia drew with the rest. Toby, she said, 'draws murderers escaping and criminals being hung – and once, I am sorry to say, the back view of God Almighty – and Adrian draws foxes, as large as deer, running along with their tongues out, and a beautiful gent, on a horse, who's himself, galloping up in front of the hounds'" (qtd. in Gillespie 22).

A certain amount of romanticizing about the perceived advantages of the life of a visual artist is understandable, especially considering that Virginia was already feeling the pressures of a writing career. Though her plan to be a visual artist never did come to fruition, her devotion to the practice of drawing is important to note. More significant is the way she upholds the two arts as interchangeable aspects – the public and the private – of her creative identity, a quality she continued to foster even after her literary prowess was well established within modernist circles in the decades that followed.

For both Vanessa and Virginia, the public and the private were explored through their shared artistic endeavours, a process that established a psychic bond between the sisters and allowed for their respective arts to develop in productive ways. However, under the surface of their intimacy existed also a significant degree of sibling rivalry. This competition was largely fuelled by the sisters' individual pursuits for professional acknowledgement.[3] Woolf had an especially difficult time relinquishing her hold on the visual arts as a viable career path and accepting that her sister might possess a level of artistic genius that escaped her grasp. In a 1926 correspondence to Bell, Woolf expresses mixed feelings of admiration and jealousy regarding her sister's artistic talents: "Indeed, I am amazed, a little alarmed [. . .] by your combination of pure artistic vision and brilliance of imagination [. . .]. I mean, people will say, What a gifted couple! Well, it would have been nicer had they said: Virginia had all the gifts; dear old Nessa was a domestic character – Alas, alas, they'll never say that now" (*Congenial* 212). By the time Virginia was well established as a professional writer and known to the reading public by her married surname, she understood her novice status as a visual artist. Nonetheless, it is the complexity of the sisters' relationship with the arts that consistently compelled Woolf to develop methods that unravelled, both in her fiction and in her essays, the preconceptions attached to their separate art forms, and to create new modes of representation by intermingling disciplinary

[3] As Gillespie writes, "Virginia listened, looked, and defined her own medium in comparison to her sister's. Still, feeling excluded from Vanessa's world, Virginia mocked the painter's preoccupations and insisted that writing was more difficult and more worthwhile. Her rivalry with Vanessa caused her to contrast their accomplishments, but her close identification with her sister's achievements reduced the competitiveness" (21). However, see also Jane Goldman's analysis of the complexity of Woolf's forewords to Bell's 1930s exhibition catalogues. While "Bell's artistic language is both a source of illumination to Woolf and something alienating and unknowable" (162), she is ultimately able to make "strong connections" to core techniques, here between "verbal language and the language of colour" (165).

strategies that conveyed vibrant scenes from marginalized perspectives and multiple embodied locations.

A notable instance in which the sisters' creative and professional ideologies came to a head was in the initial stages of making the fully illustrated edition of *Kew Gardens*.[4] In 1918, nearly a decade before the book was printed, Woolf sent a draft manuscript to her sister in the hope of receiving her feedback and potentially inspiring her to do at least one illustration to go along with the story. Bell was pleased with the narrative and felt inclined to do a drawing. However, she "cautioned Woolf that the design might be somewhat remote from the text" (Gillespie 118). This impulse to establish a degree of separation between her image and her sister's text may have been due to the influence of Roger Fry, as well as other painters, such as Henri Matisse, whom Bell had first met in 1914. Both Fry and Matisse promoted the idea that an illustrator should not be required to fill in the interpretive gaps in the text unless the story seems to be failing as a cohesive structure. Matisse expressed that writers "should have enough resources of their own to express themselves," and Fry writes that "of all such marginal commentators the draughtsman is the most discreet, for he is inaudible, he never puts an actual word into your head which might get confused with the words of the author. He merely starts a vague train of thought by the image which he puts before you in one of those pauses which the author's discursiveness allows" (qtd. in Gillespie 117-18). Although Woolf indicates in a letter that she was unconcerned whether or not the image related closely to the story – indeed, many of the dust-jacket designs Bell had already made for the Hogarth Press are abstracted images that are more suggestive than representative – Bell did produce a picture, the first of two woodcuts, for the 1919 edition of "Kew Gardens" that is surprisingly specific and referential. The image has a number of abstract qualities, such as the way the shapes alternate from black to white in a ripple pattern across the composition. Nonetheless, the focal point in the drawing is two recognizably human figures cut off at the torsos and positioned in front of a background of flower petal and

[4] Another project that highlights some of the tensions the sisters experienced when collaborating was entitled "Faces and Voices," which was to be composed of scenes written by Woolf and illustrated by Bell. In a diary entry dated February 19, 1937 Woolf writes, "[t]he difficulty wh. now faces me is how to find a public, a way of publishing, all the new ideas that are in me? I've written this morning 3 descriptions for Nessa's pictures: they can be printed by us no doubt, & somehow put into circulation" (*D5* 57). Unfortunately, as Anne Bell states in her editorial notes, this project "never in fact materialized" (57).

leaf shapes. As Gillespie recognizes, in "this design, [. . .] Bell refers not just to a specific scene [in this case the conversation the reader overhears between lower-class women] but an essential theme of the story as a whole" (119). Although, on the one hand, Bell was often concerned about artistic autonomy, it is also clear how affected she was by the imagery in Woolf's writing and the degree to which the content of her sister's narrative helped to shape her own artistic vision.

As much as Bell respected Woolf's literary talents, her resistance to cross-disciplinary pollination was consistent throughout their lives, which meant that Woolf's forays into the world of Bloomsbury aesthetics and practices, whether through conversation or in print, ignited a certain degree of resentment and defensiveness in her sibling. In a few recorded instances, Bell disclaimed the kind of literary possibilities Woolf promotes in works such as "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and *Walter Sickert: A Conversation*. In January 1925, Bell gave a talk at Leighton Park School, in which she quoted passages from "Mrs. Brown." Bell challenged Woolf's assertion in her essay that the new generation of novelists, the Georgians as Woolf calls them, are beginning to write characters that are, for all their imperfections, "beautifully" and "truthfully" rendered (39). Bell concluded that, in fact, none of the writers in the essay, her sister included, are capable of truly seeing Mrs. Brown in the railway carriage. She asserted that writers could record details that inspire the mind to make a multitude of human associations, but only visual artists (especially painters) are able to depict with emotion the forms and colours they see in front of them. As Gillespie states, Vanessa believed throughout her life that "painting is a pure, inviolable medium, divorced from the confusions and muddles of human relationships and the psychological self-analysis upon which literature depends" (7). Near the end of her talk, Bell describes how a visual artist must be wholly conscious of how every mark drawn on the page responds directly to what is being observed: "suppose you are drawing a flower. If you are capable of seeing that flower with all its subtleties of form, the way its edges recede or are sharp against the space behind, you have to try to express your feeling about those things in line. It must be sensitive, everywhere – nowhere must it become mechanical" (qtd. in Spalding 204). Spalding suggests that Bell's argument has two main "philosophical implications": that an artist should be able to "reproduce" an emotion through their art that is accessible and understandable to others; and, that in order for this "universal meaning" to occur, the artist's mode of expression must be "disinterested" (204). In other words, Bell believed that true artistic sensitivity is achieved by artists divorcing themselves from the sentimentalities of human emotion, along with

all of its attached value systems, and embracing the act of creative expression as it is lived in the moment.

Bell's suggestion that only a painter can accurately represent the emotional quality of lived experience, and that, at its best, fiction writing will never be more than didactic in its descriptions, would certainly have rankled Woolf, who believed that the character development she was pursuing in her prose was anything but formulaic. Of course, this derogatory view does not encapsulate Bell's opinion of her sister's creative faculties. Although the Bloomsbury Group proper generally championed the art of painting above all other mediums of representation,[5] there are a number of instances in their correspondence that reveal their admiration of Woolf's ability to write characters and scenes that pulse with an intrinsic life-force. For instance, in 1931 Bell ascribes directly to Woolf's "art" in an oft-quoted letter written to her sister regarding *The Waves*: "Even then I know it's only because of your art that I am so moved. I think you made one's human feelings into something less personal – if you wouldn't think me foolish I should say that you have found the 'lullaby capable of singing him to rest'" (*Congenial* 296). Bell's acknowledgement that Woolf's novel is a rhythmic work of art is certainly apt. Indeed, throughout her oeuvre, Woolf explores perspectival nuance and vivid imagery as a way to combine the structures of languages and aesthetic design. Much like a painter, she continually reacquainted herself with the subjects of the world – what Merleau-Ponty calls a "return to that world which precedes knowledge" (*PhP* ix) – before abstract methods of interrogation schematized them into a derivative and standardized structure of meaning. On March 16, 1926, during the period in which she was developing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf writes to Vita Sackville-West and outlines an approach to conceptualizing and representing the external world,

[5] Woolf was vulnerable to scrutiny from other members of the Bloomsbury group who felt that her interdisciplinary attempts were at times precocious and uninformed. Although Vanessa shared the opinions of her fellow painters, she was frequently put into the position of go-between. For instance, in October of 1911, Vanessa wrote a letter in response to Virginia's piece of art criticism, "Le Rat Mort," which was published in *The Nation*. Her missive is filled with encouragement laced with a patronizing tone: "Roger says he likes it very much. It's just what he wanted to get said. He thinks it a great advantage to have art criticism written by those who know nothing about it. For my part I couldn't see any art criticism in it. However it seemed to meet with Duncan's approval too" (qtd. in Caws 53).

which echoes Vanessa's evocation that Woolf's art is a lullaby. Woolf proposes a method of sorts for translating into written language the indeterminate patterns of experience:

> Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words. But on the other hand here I am sitting after half the morning, crammed with ideas, and visions, and so on, and can't dislodge them, for lack of the right rhythm. Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it (*L3* 247).

Woolf's reflection upon the act of writing addresses what she sees to be the inherent paradox of translating life onto the page. In this passage, Woolf discusses two distinct kinds of rhythm interchangeably: the rhythm of "style," or the process of creating a work of art, and the rhythm of lived experience – of receiving external stimuli from the world. These patterns, which are instigated either by a visual sensation or an emotional cue, must be allowed to conjoin and become a synergetic sequence in the mind. According to Woolf, the challenge for the writer is to transcribe these sensory patterns into an impactful flow of syntax by allowing words to find their shape, even if it is not beautifully or coherently rendered, as the writer attempts to access the pulse of the original sensation.

I argue that Woolf's wave metaphor is a philosophical attempt to reconcile a fundamental contradiction of perceiving and representing the world, and parallels Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the phenomenological description. For Merleau-Ponty, understanding how we exist in the world is not by simply observing successions of causal factors or constructs of "pure concepts" devised by the "intellect" (Landes 148). Therefore, the philosopher (or artist) is tasked with providing descriptions that touch upon the multiple patterns of being-in-the-world, that indicate the overlapping and nesting gestalts of human experience without reducing it to a reproducible system of thought. Merleau-Ponty writes that "[p]hilosophy is not a lexicon, it is not concerned with 'word-meanings,' it does not seek a verbal substitute for the world we see, it does not transform it into something said, it does not install itself in the order of the said or of the written as does the logician in the proposition [. . .] It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression" (*VI* 4). Woolf's conception of rhythm as

expressed in her letter to Sackville-West intersects powerfully with this impulse: she seeks to reveal to the reader the conditions and "circumstances" by which an object, sensation, or action comes into being – that is, into the scope of the perceiver's awareness – as opposed to describing the phenomenon from a static pre-formulated perspective (see Wrathall, "Existential" 43). In this light, the phenomenological description establishes an intentionality wherein the reader becomes aware of a pulse of relations among thoughts, sensations, and actions. As Woolf asserts in her letter, it is the rhythm created by these relations that allows words and signs to organize and build structures of meaning in the mind, and that is, I suggest, a phenomenological process because it is concerned with the essence of acts and the essential relations between them regardless of the transitory nature of the movement itself. As Stephen Crowell puts it, phenomenology "is an eidetic science, not a factual one" (13). Therefore, there are potential challenges inherent in Woolf's thoughts about rhythm because "there are a number of different ways in which entities can show themselves to us" (Wrathall, "Existential" 32). For this reason, the wave of mental images a writer must access and "recapture," in Woolf's words, is an essential part of an experience that can only be represented tangentially, and through cross-reference and association.

Throughout her career, Woolf conceptualized the indeterminacies of the world through reflections on visual art, suggesting the need for relationality, and not just among disciplinary practices. For instance, she frequently described her sister's art as a "silent world [. . .] beautiful and transcendent, but somehow chillingly inhuman" (Gillespie 74). In *Walter Sickert*, she uses this metaphor of silence as a way to make a direct connection between painters and novelists. Indeed, in her essay, the fictionalized dialogue between various narrators at a dinner party coheres into one of the most sophisticated modernist discussions on interdisciplinarity. At first, Woolf seems to establish a sharp distinction between painting and writing. Through the guise of one of the diners, she argues that painters "are seeing things we cannot see, just as a dog bristles and whines in the dark lane when nothing is visible to the human eye. They are making passes with their hands, to express what they cannot say" (11). However, the narrator continues and suggests, "it may be [. . .] that there is a zone of silence in every art" (11). As Morris observes, this sentiment echoes Rancière's theory dissensus and consensus: one of the aspects of a dissensual aesthetic is the "equality of mute things that are more eloquent than the most heroic orator" (7). It is not surprising that the literary form Woolf most associates with "art" is that of the novelist, an assertion she makes viable by first contrasting Sickert with a biographer and then

by comparing him to a novelist. One of the diners suggests that when Sickert "[s]its a man or woman down in front of him he sees the whole of the life that has been lived to make that face. There it is – stated. None of our biographers make such complete and flawless statements. They are tripped up by those miserable impediments called facts" (12). After this assertion is made, another diner argues that Sickert is more like a novelist or playwright: he "likes to set his characters in motion, to watch them in action" (13). Through cross-comparison, Woolf is able to make the same case for writers as her sister does for painters in her talk at Leighton, but without championing one art form over the other. According to Woolf, when sitting down to represent a subject, a good novelist, like a good painter, recognizes a silent realm devoid of certainties and facts and plunges in to describe what he or she observes without sentiment or commentary.

It is this immediacy of the technique that speaks strongly to Woolf. A painter's freedom in choosing an array of colours and mix them directly on a palette in response to an immediate perceptual encounter seemed an intoxicating process for a writer who would frequently be "crammed" with thoughts for "lack of the right rhythm" to "dislodge" them (L3 247). I would argue that Sickert was an example of a painter who sought after the "apprehension" of the "phenomena" of his surroundings. (Wrathall, "Existential" 42). In *Walter Sickert*, Woolf refers to him as a "literary painter" (184), a moniker which is certainly apt for many of his works. His portrait subjects display gestures that vibrate with interior energy, as though caught in suspended animation between one pose and another, and that suggest narrative moments saturated with psychological intent. For example, his painting entitled *The Acting Manager* (1885) depicts a woman in a dark dress positioned on the right side of a long sofa couch that extends off the picture plane. Her posture is dramatically splayed across the sofa seat with her arm draped over her head and her elbow leaning heavily on the back of the couch. The dark shadows under her dress make it difficult to determine the positioning of her feet – are they folded underneath her body, or are they suspended precariously off the sofa? The feeling of physical tension in her pose, as though she has just thrust herself onto the couch moments before, contrasts with the emotional weight of her brooding expression. An oval mirror on a tall table-stand looms up nearly perpendicular to the sofa just behind the woman's head. The glass in the mirror is too high (nearly reaching the top of the composition) to reveal its reflection to the viewer, creating a psychologically ominous effect. Further resonating tension is established by Sickert's vigorous brush-strokes and dramatic areas of lights and darks, which are overlaid upon the careful

arrangement of the composition. The result of these aesthetic choices is an image that epitomizes Fry's significant form, one that is unquestionably resolved in its design, and yet indeterminate in its meaning and intent.

Sickert described his world with paint on canvas in a way that allowed each layer and brush-stroke to contribute its own distinct quality to the inherent effect of the overall composition. In the same way that Sickert's approach to depicting his surroundings allowed him to avoid pigeon-holing phenomena into a predetermined structure of thought, Woolf's ability to describe lived experience revealed her heightened "apprehension of the phenomenon as it is in itself" (Wrathall, "Existential" 43). Her approach to representing the world mirrors the way she articulates with eloquence and sensitivity her understanding of the painter's medium. This openness is why, throughout her life, Woolf continued to learn and observe from the visual arts, and to define – in her essays and fiction – "her own [literary] medium in comparison to her sister's" (Gillespie 21). For instance, On June 2, 1926, Woolf writes to Bell responding to an exhibition of her sister's paintings. Interestingly, much like Vanessa with her patronizing statements regarding "La Morte Rat," Woolf mixes praise with criticism and expresses an authoritative tone that is lightly masked:

> Then I went to your show. [. . .] What I think is this: there is a divinely lovely landscape of yours of Charleston: one of flashing brilliance, of sunlight crystallized, of diamond durability. This I consider your masterpiece. I do not think the big picture of Angelica etc. in the garden quite succeeds. I expect the problem of empty spaces, and how to model them, has rather baffled you. There are flat passages, so that the design is not completely comprehended. [. . .] A mistress of the brush – you are now undoubtedly that; but still I think the problems of design on a large scale slightly baffle you [. . .] [w]here the frame of the design is prominent, then, now and again, you falter, or somehow flatten. (*Congenial* 212)

Bell's "problem with empty spaces" has to do with an inability to recognize how some parts of the composition relate to the overall rhythm and pulse of the design. Woolf suggests that, when Bell is at a loss, rather than allow areas of relative simplicity or complexity to exist as distinct but necessary parts of the whole, she resorts to a kind of aesthetic fabrication. Of course, this is not to say that Bell was not acutely aware of the challenges involved in creating harmony among disparate elements in a visual composition. For instance, in the 1931 letter in which *The Waves* is

discussed, Bell writes: "I've been working hard lately at an absurd great picture I've been painting off and on the last 2 years – and if I could only do what I want to – but I can't – it seems to me it would have some sort of analogous meaning to what I've done. How can one explain, but to me painting a floor covered with toys and keeping them all in relation to each other and the figures and the space of the floor and the light on it means something of the same sort that you seem to me to mean" (*Congenial* 296). Goldman argues that this suggests the sisters' "common sense of intersubjectivity" in their art (*Feminist* 150), which I view in terms of intentionality but also in terms of pattern. I posit that Woolf shared with her sister, what Merleau-Ponty would call a "'non-thetic'" perception of the world: she had the ability a painter has to vividly describe or interpret an aspect of the world, or a work of art, with "no express experience of it" (qtd. in Wrathall, "Existential" 32). Because of this heightened perceptual faculty, she had the capacity to see the inherent designs in nature aside from associative meanings, and to recognize when these designs could be translated into print.

For both Woolf and Bell, formally describing the world around them was the central and defining action of their artistic processes. In Bell's case, colour was the primary conduit of her expression, and it "usually determined her choice of subject" (Spalding 208). In Goldman's reading, Bell "acknowledges art as a fiction, but that it is constructed out of rhythms and movements the artist abstracts from life (material and historical)" (*Feminist* 146). For instance, she frequently rejected traditionally accepted landscape views and picturesque scenes, even when she travelled on painting retreats to more exotic locations such as Venice, Italy. Rather, she was inspired by the stimulus of the domestic and the everyday: "the sight of a colour chord set up by a patch of wall, green shutters and a window-box" (Spalding 208). Gillespie observes how "portraiture, still-life, and landscape overlap in both sisters' work. People appear indoors among solid objects that embody their interests and statuses or outside in landscape settings that suggest states of mind or that transcend individual egos" (12). Vanessa's painting, *Studland Beach* (1912), provides an effective illustration of the quotidian subject matter so prevalent in her work, as well as some of the core stylistic similarities between Vanessa and Virginia as artists. Though some critics have argued whether or not *Studland Beach* is completely resolved, it has been lauded as a bold advancement in style. In many ways, the painting is an imposing picture: the composition is divided by a nearly straight diagonal line delineating the boundary between water and land. The remaining elements – seven human figures and a dressing tent – are rendered in

dark outlines and create a flattened pattern of repeated shapes and angles arranged into two clusters. The sea, the beach, and the edge of what appears to be a grassy embankment, burst across the expanse of the painting from the top right corner. Lisa Tickner suggests that the "intensity of the blue is one of the most striking features of the painting, standing ambiguously for a single fabric of sea and sky. Partly because of a slight directionality to the brushwork and partly because of the red underpainting revealed at its lower edge, the blue rolls forward over the beach like a heavy atmospheric pressure rather than an infinitely receding, airy brightness" (67). Rather than rendering an illusionistic representation of a seascape, Bell offers an alternate space for the viewer to interpret, an environment with its own formal logic and emotional cues. As Maggie Humm asserts, "[t]he artist is in full control, using confident abstractions and a careful [colour] palette. *Studland Beac*h consciously distills experience" (*Snapshots* 24). In this light, Bell's paintings, much like Woolf's prose, are imaginative constructions that organize the rhythms of lived experience into a discursive taxonomy of memory, sensation, and thought.

Although we know that throughout her career, Bell was reticent to seek out explicit connections between aesthetic form and narrative, her painting style and motifs from the early 1920s onwards exemplify the blending of eidetic and perceptual qualities so prevalent in Woolf's prose. One example, *The Open Door* (1926), was painted in the newly built Charleston studio.[6] Many of Bell's and Duncan Grant's paintings of this period were interior scenes looking out onto the Charleston garden through an entryway. Bell's *Open Door* depicts a space bathed in patterns of warm midday light. If not for the central threshold shapes placed into the composition at dramatic angles, it may have been nearly impossible for the viewer to determine where the garden meets the studio entrance. In fact, the doorway mouldings are the only architectural signifiers in the painting. The rest of the image is held together visually by brush-stroke swatches and patterns, which serve to indicate the volume and surface of the subjects in the work, the most prominent ones being a plant stand with a flower vase standing near a soft lounging chair in the foreground, and a wicker chair placed in front of a patch of tall garden shrubs. As Richard Shone suggests, these focal points reinforce the "continuity between interior and exterior, the two chairs

[6] Richard Shone writes that the Charleston studio was both practical and spacious, and was built "to Roger Fry's design, the object being 'to have as much room and spend as little money as possible' [. . .]. It benefited from both north and west light, [and] was large enough to accommodate two or three painters" (*Bloomsbury* 218).

making a formal mirror-image, the rectangle of the mat repeating that of the terrace, and the flowers in the vase becoming a miniature of the herbaceous border outside" (*Bloomsbury* 218). Vanessa's painting, like many others of this period, establishes a trysting place between the visual and the imaginative senses. The reader infers a narrative both within and beyond the borders of the illusionistic space because the viewer is a conscious being who, in Heidegger's words, understands him or herself "proximally and for the most part in terms of its world" (qtd. in Wrathall "Exisatential" 39). This phenomenological aspect of Bell's work reveals one of its strongest parallels to Woolf's prose, in the various ways it expresses the ambiguity of lived experience – at times, as Woolf believed, with more immediate and accessible results than words could ever achieve.

The phenomenological connection between the sister's arts is perhaps seen most directly in their collaborative version of *Kew Gardens* (1927). This final edition of the story features illustrations by Bell on every page, many of which, as Liliane Louvel points out, are "reminiscent of William Blake's [. . .] in their intimate intertwining of words and images" (3). In the prose sections of the work, Woolf blends an array of sensory and psychological viewpoints, which makes the story a significant example of Woolf's phenomenological writing. Merleau-Ponty writes that "by lending his body to the world [. . .] the artist changes the world into paintings" ("Eye" 123). This transformation is possible because the body is not viewed "as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions" but as an "intertwining of vision and movement" (124). I suggest the written vignettes in *Kew Gardens* simulate the visual and embodied encounter a painter has with the world, and that Bell's illustrations are the visual frames that allow the reader of the text to make elliptical movements from one vividly descriptive scene to another. The reader is swept along by the multiple rhythms of the narration and experiences them in much the same way that Woolf describes an encounter with an exhibition of Walter Sickert paintings, where the "stillness, warmth and seclusion from the perils of the [outside world] reproduce the conditions of the primeval forest" (*WS* 8-9). Woolf and Bell's depiction of a universe of plants and flowers combined with thought and memory establishes a interconnected system of sensory gestalts, a fictional universe that has been seen and touched by its creators.

Throughout *Kew Gardens* there are examples of the kind of integration of design and content so strongly present in Vanessa's *Studland Beach* and *The Open Door*. Page four demonstrates a beautiful instance of image and text, form and content, combining in ink on the

paper. Bell's brush-strokes move across the page as though curling from behind to the front of the text block. The white spaces between the marks are as significant as the brush-strokes themselves. In other words, there is a visual/psychic balance created between white and black, negative and positive space, and large and small patterns and textures. The printed words become another visual texture on the page that complements the bold movements of the brush-strokes, and allow the eye to move in and out of the design without stopping in one place. The repeated spiral/floral shapes act as anchoring points, creating separate dimensional planes – an illusion that is augmented by the word "would" on the bottom right corner, which slightly overlaps onto the flower shape. In this way, the reader/viewer looks through the illusionistic space of the plate as the words are apprehended both materially as marks on the page and intellectually according to what they denote. The text itself describes an unnamed man's memory of proposing to a character named Lily: "I knew without looking up what she was going to say: the whole of her seemed to be in her shoe. And my love, my desire, were in the dragonfly; for some reason I thought that if it settled there, on that leaf, the one with the red flower in the middle of it, if the dragon-fly settled on the leaf she would say 'yes' at once" (4). The content of Woolf's passage merges with the effect of the design by exploring two internal planes, past and present, and imaginatively merging them with the physical world. The overall composition of the page, which includes both its visual design and its linguistic meaning, coheres into a single representational statement: a moment in time framed by the narrator's contemplation and yet activated by the "circling" movement of the dragonfly, a flight pattern which is both stated in Woolf's prose and implied by Bell's spiral brush marks sweeping around the text block to the flower shape in the left-hand corner.

Woolf and Bell resolved to create a visual/textual harmony through intersections between form and content on each page of *Kew Gardens*. The project illustrates how Woolf and Bell were capable of creating meaning through diverse depictions of space, physical gestures, and psychological states. There is a persistent tension/harmony between image and text on each page of the text. For instance, Bell's design on page two operates as a visual container for the text. The bold brush strokes direct the eye in a punctuated and contracted rhythm around the edges of the text block. The text block itself rests like a cinderblock on top of the mass of black petal-like strokes on the bottom of the page. The overall visual effect is that of an immovable garden sculpture or ornament, which contrasts quite dramatically with the mutable images the words

invoke in their referential function. Alternatively, page fourteen displays words and images intersecting and interrupting each other. Vanessa's illustrations, such as the prominent flower shape that thrusts through the middle of the text block, fragment the flow of meaning by creating visual barriers and stops in the syntax. At the same time, the overall design of the page is unified by the words and flower shapes acting as visual textures dispersed in a cohesive pattern throughout the design. On every page of the book, Bell's brush-strokes both confine and release the text, as Woolf's language depicts movements of light and sequences of conversation interspersed with descriptions of solid objects. This integration of the imaginary and sensory aspects of the fictional world enables visualization, as the art represents phenomena derived from the patterns and textures of external, material world. The initial passages of the story speak to the movement of both the eye and the mind, as Woolf describes movements of light passing through and reflecting off solid objects: "The petals were voluminous enough to be stirred by the summer breeze, and when they moved, the red, blue and yellow lights passed one over the other, staining an inch of the brown earth beneath with a spot of the most intricate colour" (2). Woolf does not provide information about the type and species of the flowers. Rather, she is more interested in describing their shapes and colours, and giving the impression of the effect they create as one "voluminous" mass modified by the light of the sun and a passing breeze. From the start the narrator establishes a perceptual mode of representation so the reader might experience the relatively confined space where the action of the story takes place and see in it a universe of potentialities.

Kew Gardens, through its masterful and collaborative blending of word and image and of imaginary and sensory elements, acts as a template for the broader philosophical mechanisms at play in Woolf's work as a whole. Chia-Chen Kuo observes that the "long close-up of the flower bed, leading the reader to focus on the smallest details, the mutations and gradations of light and color, in effect foregrounds the strange non-humanness of [a] camera shot" (192). Indeed, much like the lens of a camera, Woolf's descriptions in *Kew Gardens*, and in the majority of her prose works, both contract and expand views of the scenes, and alter the location of the reading position as the narrator's viewpoint shifts from a more diffusive perspective, in which petals and patterns of light blend together into a unifying whole, to a concentrated focus on a single leaf: "and the light now settled upon the flesh of a leaf, revealing the branching thread of the fibre beneath the surface" (2). This blending of, and moving back and forth from, varying viewpoints

simulates for the reader a phenomenological action, and it opened up new vistas for understanding the world through literary means. As Kuo indicates in her Deleuzian reading of *Kew Gardens*, Woolf's narrative structures synthesize eidetic and sensory elements to create multiple points of perspective. Kuo argues that the narrative simulates a cinematic experience for the reader, which echoes Woolf's assertions in "The Cinema." In her essay, Woolf writes that when viewing a film, "[t]he eye licks it all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch things happening without bestirring itself to think" (166). Kuo uses the Deleuzian idea of the "voice-over-voice," which posits there is a pre-conscious voice that ignites in the mind of the viewer of cinema before he or she is able to consciously structure the "strange and unfamiliar images and sounds" emitted from the screen (181). Kuo writes this "'voice' is ambivalently subjective-objective, linguistic-mental-bodily, appearing and/or being heard on the movie screen and/or on our mind-screen" (181). She also explains that Deleuze considers this voice-over-voice "nonhuman," for it offers a kind of out-of-body vantage-point that is at the same time generated by and through the senses (182). It is strikingly similar to the dynamic and outcome the Woolf describes in "The Cinema":

> [t]he eye wants to help. The eye says to the brain, 'something is happening which I do not in the least understand. You are needed.' Together they look at the king, the boat, the horse, and the brain sees at once that they have taken on a quality which does not belong to the simple photograph of real life. They have become not more beautiful in the sense in which pictures are beautiful, but shall we call it (our vocabulary is miserably insufficient) more real, or real with a different reality from which we perceive in daily life? (167)

This "compound of sensations," what Deleuze refers to as precepts and affects, are encountered only by the body and are not organized by the consciousness. Echoing the eye's experience, it is synthesis of a "nonhuman point of view and point of articulation" in *Kew Gardens* that enables the reader to "vibrate with the rhythm of the narration" in a manner that echoes the experience of watching a film, a medium which itself mimics what Deleuze called the "'landscape before man,'" a "milieu" of elements and interactions to which humans are both passively receptive and actively responsive (qtd. in Kuo 187).

In its emphasis on embodiment and ambiguity, Deleuze's image of the landscape of infinite possibilities parallels with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of film. Merleau-Ponty suggests that "a film is not a sum total of images, but a temporal gestalt," or a compound of

images that "is essentially characterized by its rhythm," and that "the meaning of a shot [. . .] depends on what precedes it in the movie, and this succession of scenes creates a new reality which is not merely the sum of its parts" (qtd. in Carbone 42). Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the process and reception of the film medium ties directly to the "[t]he creative role of montage, which he considered to be cinema's main form of expression" (Carbone 43). Although there have been numerous stylistic examples throughout the history of film, the primary purpose of montage as a technique is to channel a considerable degree of narrative information into a condensed yet wholly comprehensible sequence of frames. For the film editor, this usually means splicing images and sound into understandable packages of meaning by using a range of techniques (dissolves, fades, split-screen, double and triple exposures). Merleau-Ponty was especially interested in montage because it helped him to "highlight how much 'the time-factor for each shot' means to the film itself, to remind us that 'the alternation of words and silence is manipulated to create the most effective image'"(Carbone 46). The implication to be drawn from this reading of film, which, I argue, expands upon the comparatively passive role of the receiver in the Deleuzian interpretation, is that alongside the creative role of the artist/film maker to decide the sequencing and ordering of images, there is also an active role on the viewer's part to comprehend the narrative meaning of the film by receiving it through the physical senses.

Merleau-Ponty argued that the experience of interpreting a film by witnessing images flashed in succession upon a screen, particularly when the montage technique is employed, echoes the kind of attention humans give to the objects in our world. As Jessica Wiskus explains it, "perception operates through a certain principle of dislocation, for the more fixedly I stare at an object, the more it begins to vibrate – to lose its solidity. If I wish to grasp a sense of the object as stable, I must, paradoxically, keep my gaze in motion by, in effect, looking at the object in several different moments in time" (16). This perceptual mode of temporal dislocation was explored in-depth by Woolf and Bell through their respective arts, and perhaps nowhere more extensively and profoundly than in their exploration of amateur photography[7] and the construction of photo albums, which were constant and mutually beneficial crafts practiced by

[7] "Bloomsbury members as a group consistently used the term *amateur* in a positive sense to articulate a detachment from *professional*, that is, associated with trade and artistic consumerism. And photography, as Susan Sontag suggests, is the only major art in which amateurs can excel" (Humm, *Snapshots* 11).

the sisters throughout their lives. In *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, Humm's compilation and examination of the Bloomsbury family photo albums demonstrate the degree to which the siblings explored the intimate merging of life and representation in their observing and documenting daily moments through the camera lens. Humm posits that the "albums' lack of chronological logic matches Woolf's refusal of narrative realism in her fiction and illustrates the intertextuality of past and present" (*Snapshots* 9). In this way, she argues, the albums are a "medium" that are meant to be "read [. . .] for [their] complex interweaving of technical with historical and personal issues. In addition, photographs in photo albums, for all their superficial fixity, are constantly exchanging meanings with each other and with different viewers" (25). For Woolf in particular, making photo albums was an integral interdisciplinary strategy that helped to define her writing practice. Humm writes that

> [o]ften the very structure of Woolf's sentences, for example, Woolf's frequent use of ellipses, creates an implied reader, much like the repetition of objects in the Woolfs' photography needs an active spectator. The Woolfs' constant photography practice and Virginia's early knowledge of photographic techniques, including framing, space, and distance, would unconsciously shape her fictional use of frames. (*Snapshots* 19)

Woolf's ability to see and articulate her world through an indeterminate ordering of visual and psychological frames overlaps with Deleuzian conceptions of precepts and affects, as well as with Merleau-Pontian notions of the montage. Training her eye to see the world through a camera lens enabled yet another way for Woolf to understand the perceptual world, which in turn provided new methods to represent in her prose the varying structures of the everyday through a multiplicity of perspectives, rather than from a single, potentially totalizing, point of view. Humm states that the siblings' albums

> share the same traces in their photography, but the photographs are also varied reconstructions of their worlds, replete with complex psychic layers. The photographs voice the unsaid, like quasi subjects. Studying these domestic photographs in terms of affect might help with the troubling issue of quality. How do we read domestic photographs that acknowledge their often profoundly complex traces without categorizing the photographs as technically banal? (*Snapshots* 25)

Page sixteen of the Monk's House Album (number three) is emblematic of the formal concerns that pervade in all of the books. The page features four portraits taken in 1931 of Virginia,

Quentin and Julian Bell, and John Lehmann. The photos are arranged in a grid on the page; they depict repeated gazes, gestures, patterns, and focal angles, which establish a visual organization that is both coherent and indeterminate. The two Bell brothers are stacked on top of each other on the right side of the page. They both look directly at the camera with neutral expressions on their faces. The backgrounds give just enough information to suggest they are sitting in the same walled garden with climbing vines. The photos on the left seem to be more candid shots of Virginia and Lehmann. The top left photo is of Virginia lounging in a cushioned chair in front of a wall of bookshelves. The picture has been cropped drastically – nearly two-thirds of the image is taken up with three levels of book shelving – giving the impression that Virginia's body is slowly sinking out of the picture plane. The photo on the lower- left corner captures a moment in a conversation between Virginia and Lehmann while they sit on a white bench near a pond – it is difficult to determine if the camera has caught them in the act of conversation or in an instance of mutual internal reverie.

Humm asserts there is a purposeful intent behind the arrangement of the photos on every page of the Monk's House Albums. On page sixteen, the viewer is encouraged to interpret the pictures by making aesthetic observations: the way the angles of the bookshelves create a visual counterpoint for the angles of the tops of the garden walls and the grassy edge along the pond; or the way the sitters themselves are different sizes, positions, and heights in relation to each other, which creates a sense of dimension and volume. A kind of foreground and background is created by Julian's close-up portrait put to the right and slightly lower than the far away shot of Woolf and Lehmann. This attention to the placement of the photos to create a meaningful arrangement of forms correlates with the strategies a filmmaker uses in the montage technique. Merleau-Ponty stresses in a French radio series, "Causeries" (1948) that "[w]hat matters is the choice of the represented episodes, and, in each one of them, the choice of images that will appear in the film, the length respectively attribute to each of these elements, the order in which one chooses to present them, the sound or the words with which one means or not to accompany them, all this would constitute a global cinematic rhythm" (qtd. in Carbone 55). It is certainly apparent that one may look to one page, or even one pairing of photos, in the Bloomsbury albums to see a pattern present within the whole. Humm suggests that these "repetitive [and many times] paired sequences go beyond the conventions of candid or instant photography. In their use of repetition, the photographs are dialogic, encouraging dialogue between the sitters and between husband and

wife as camera operators" (*Snapshots* 23). On page sixteen of the Monk's House Album, all of the faces on the album page seem to be both connected to and alienated from the figures in the other pictures. Because of the indeterminacies involved in the inter-human connections implicit in the photographs, the viewer is encouraged to assemble what Merleau-Ponty calls the "lateral relations" among the visual elements of the frames (*VI* 22). Through this assemblage, the viewer is enabled to interpret the "silent territory" of which Woolf writes, a realm between thought and sense, words and image, narrative and significant form (*WS* 183).

If one accepts, as Woolf certainly does, that thought and sensation are interchangeable elements within the larger pattern of being in the world, then one may understand what Merleau-Ponty means when he writes that "my body simultaneously sees and is seen" ("Eye" 124). The human perceives the things of the world all the while aware of itself as a perceiving entity. The philosophical problem this idea raises is that neither the self, nor the world in which it lives, can then be defined by a transparent method or system of inquiry. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty writes, it is a "self of confusion, narcissism, inherence of the seer in the seen, the toucher in the touched, the feeler in the felt – a self, then, that is caught up in things, having a front and a back, a past and a future" ("Eye" 124). Merleau-Ponty asserts that unlike some prevailing Cartesian systems of knowledge, which accept that there is a fundamental dichotomy between the body and the mind based on the principle that the body can "be rationally doubted" by the mind, the existential-phenomenological perspective accounts for the inherent ambiguity and confusion implied by their union (Jacquette 294). The further implication of this argument is that it is indeed possible for an artist to be aware of themself in the act of creation while they have experiences in the world, which, as Wrathall argues, "is phenomenologically different than experiencing things and thinking about them" ("Existential" 39). I suggest that Woolf was acutely aware of this philosophical distinction. As a writer, she knew that the problem of representation could only be addressed by subjugating the sanctified conventions of language to the ever-fluctuating patterns of experience.

In "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty quotes Paul Valéry, who writes that "the painter takes his body with him" (123). I argue that the immediacy of the painter's medium requires the artist to be dependent upon the perceptual world and upon an active engagement with the body. These indicators aptly describe Woolf's distinctive form of prose fiction, where "impressions rather than facts [are] conveyed" (Prudente 2). In this light, *Kew Gardens* is an important "experimental

space" for both of the sisters: it highlights the skills and understanding learned from a lifetime of shared engagement in the visual and literary arts (2). For Woolf in particular, *Kew Gardens* is illustrative of both her materialist and phenomenologically guided tendencies. She represents her reality – the rhythms of her lived experience – by entwining the architectures of the sensory and the imaginary into a denotative structure of relations. Of course, much like the pairings and sequences in the sisters' photo albums, *Kew Gardens* is simply one motif in the overall design of her oeuvre. Because of Woolf's heightened visual and eidetic talents, understanding her works is comparable to the experience of moving through the spaces of a painting exhibition, where a dialogue amongst the representations of colour, light, and depth is apprehended as a "texture of differentiations" (Carbone 1), an intricately patterned filter of the natural world and of lived experience.

1.3 The Embodied Canvas of Experience: Woolf, Merleau-Ponty, and the Art of Perceiving

The focus of this project is Woolf's approach to the seeming contradiction involved in reflecting upon and representing the everyday moments of experience; to depict "'life'" as it "is located in the everyday entanglement of mind and matter" (Ryan 1). Gleaning from the visual arts' creative perspectives and strategies, she developed literary methods that worked from Roger Fry's aesthetic theories of significant form and engaged with Vanessa Bell's materialist sensibilities as a painter to render textually embodied perceptions of spaces in time. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's reflections on visual art participate in a similar sense of the interpenetration of the self and world. In this chapter, I compare Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past" and Merleau-Ponty's "Cézanne's Doubt" to highlight their shared assertion that by reacquainting oneself with particular experiences as they are depicted in works of art, the individual can be more attentive to and engaged in day-to-day moments and the non-human; they can "abandon [themself] to the chaos of sensation" ("Doubt" 3) and the flux and flow of existence. For Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne understood what it is to "look at nature as only a human being can," and that, through practice, one could describe the world with colour, shape, texture, and line (2). Similarly, Woolf argues in "A Sketch of the Past" that one's ability to embrace one's experience of the world is made possible because of memory, and that the "shock" inherent in significant "moments of being" can be recaptured and remembered, and can pulsate even through the "many more moments of non-being" (72, 70). In this light, Woolf's memoir is a kind of guidebook that traces without drawing borders the ripples of significant experiences that interpenetrate her life. It is as much a work of art as it is a record of the memories infused within her body; as much a reflexive experiment as it is a reencounter with the "latent knowledge" stored within the sensory faculties of the self (Smith 3). Woolf's narrator exudes an intentionality that extends beyond the classical mentalistic definitions[1] of the term and expresses a unifying rhythm between the mind and the body, between

[1] It is widely recognized that the first thinker to utilize the concept of intentionality from a phenomenological standpoint was Franz Brentano in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874). Since his focus was to determine how phenomena could be categorized through the immanence of the mind, the term intentionality by and large became equated with

the perceiving subject and the world being perceived. It is this awareness of conceivable patterns created by the interpenetrating moments of lived experience which led both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty to assert in their writings that perceiving the world is indeed an art, one in which the perceiver gives contingent shape to the indeterminacies of lived experience by orienting the body within familiar spaces and vantage points, and by encountering them again as though for the first time.

Both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty believed that the creative process initiates a series of reverberating echoes that draw attention to the multiple and intersecting gestalts of one's lived experience. Edmund Husserl and Merleau-Ponty explain that this apprehension of being-in-the-world happens between the essence of things and their surrounding relations. For instance, one's memories are derived from, and even given form through, perceptual acts. Steven Crowell uses an analogy to illustrate this assertion: "When I remember the cup of coffee I had yesterday, the content of this memory is not simply the cup, conceived as an item in the world, but the cup that I drank from, admired, in short, perceived" (14). This embodied interaction with the world, which has meaning precisely because it is a world in which one is being and doing, poses the central paradox of phenomenological inquiry: how can one engage truly and effectively in an intellectual study of experience that is based solely on what Husserl called first-person Evidenz,[2] and that is, like any philosophical inquiry, unavoidably objective? Although Husserl was never able to solve this dilemma – some scholars have even classified his approach as a "kind of Cartesianism, subject to the same limitations as its historical model" (Crowell 19) – it seems that he set the stage for philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to take up the mantle of ambiguity and develop, if not a solution, a more plausible construct to account for the impossibility of clarifying and articulating the essence of experience, particularly in regards to the synthesis of the body and the mind.

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cognitive aspects of being. It was not until Merleau-Ponty used the concept as a way to synthesize empirical and intellectual perspectives that phenomenologists began to consider in earnest the implications of intentionality as a theory of perception. As A.D. Smith explains, "[*p*]*erception* is a 'mentalistic' notion; and the *body* is 'physical.' Merleau-Ponty, however, unifies them as the subject and the predicate of his fundamental assertion: *the body perceives*" (2).

[2] Crowell writes that "Husserl's general term for this intuitive epistemic component is *Evidenz*. This does not mean 'evidence' in the sense of a trace from which something is inferred; rather it is the self-presence of the thing itself, its 'self-givenness' according to its own type" (15).

Existentialists, both then – Husserl; Sartre; de Beauvoir; Merleau-Ponty – and now – Alphonso Lingis[3]; Renaud Barbaras[4]; Chris Nagel – have been aware of this problem of synthesis. Early on in his career, Merleau-Ponty identifies Husserl's conundrum and develops what we might think of as a phenomenology of open alternatives. As Mark Wrathall states, Merleau-Ponty "conceives the unity of the self as something that is not itself fully given in experience. It is a 'possibility of situations,' a 'field' which encounters the world in a unified way, but which is not itself fully explicit and understandable to itself. We understand ourselves as we understand the world, progressively manifesting ourselves as we unfold our existence in the temporal world" ("Existential" 40). For over sixty years, thinkers in the field of phenomenology have been both enamoured and frustrated by Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "philosophizing begins not with the self or the world but with their reciprocal confirmation" (Quinn 11).[5] The notion of an inherent synthesis between consciousness and the world produced a driving thematic question in French phenomenological thought regarding the "ontological 'mystery' of the origin of incarnate meaning [. . .]. How can there be, for me as a conscious subject, a world that is in-itself?" (Nagel 18). In other words, how is it possible to have experiences that are both irrefutable and mysterious in nature? And how might one live in a world that exists as its own entity separate from consciousness while at the same time is an insistent reminder of all the specificities of existence that are known and familiar to the psyche?

In "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty examines further this apparent contradiction of Being-in-the-world by considering how the comprehension and representation of one's lived experience may be paralleled with the creative processes of an artist. He suggests that if society continues to wholly embrace intellectualism, or the analytical aspects of the sciences, without giving attention to the senses, there is a risk of experiencing a "cultural regimen in which there is neither truth nor falsehood concerning humanity and history, into a sleep, or nightmare from which there is no awakening" ("Eye" 122). According to Merleau-Ponty, the absolute and operational

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[3] See *Deathbound Subjectivity* (2003).
[4] See *Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception* (2006).
[5] Nagel suggests that even after devoted efforts by phenomenologists through the 20th and into the 21st century, "it is not clear that this project of phenomenology has advanced beyond the point Merleau-Ponty had already reached in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Different starting points have led to different trajectories of inquiry [. . .]. Each presents us with the fundamental mystery in a new form" (18).

understandings of being and consciousness offered by science contrast with the perspective of the artist, the painter in particular, who " is entitled to look at everything without being obliged to appraise what he sees" (123). In other words, the painter is so absorbed with the act of representation that the preordered and systematic "watchwords of knowledge and action lose their meaning and force" (123). It is the experience, not the established system of value or evaluation, that becomes the focus of the work.

Woolf regards the visual arts in a similar way in her essays and fiction. The many limitations to and indeterminacies of perceiving the world led Woolf to traverse the boundaries of artistic disciplines as a way to draw inspiration and knowledge from multiple wells of creative insight. For instance, early in "A Sketch of the Past," she imagines what it would be like to represent a life with the medium of paint, and throughout the essay she describes her perceptual memories as though she were a viewer moving through a picture gallery. At times she observes moments from a distance and as a whole; at other instances, she views them up close so that her entire vision is overwhelmed by the patterns, colours, and textures of the remembered experience. Her experimentation with visual art strategies is also seen in *Walter Sickert*. Early in the essay, Woolf describes through the voice of one of the diners her experience walking through an exhibition of Walter Sickert paintings: "I became completely and solely an insect – all eye. I flew from colour to colour, from red to blue, from yellow to green. Colours went spirally through my body lighting a flare as if a rocket fell through the night and lit up greens and browns, grass and trees" (9). Woolf's imagined ocular existence, at once limited and all-encompassing, is similar to Merleau-Ponty's description of the painter's unique perception: "The painter's world is a visible world, nothing but visible: a world almost mad, because it is complete though only partial. Painting awakens and carries to its highest pitch a delirium which is vision itself, for to see is to have at a distance; painting extends this strange possession to all aspects of being, which must somehow become visible in order to enter the world of art" ("Eye" 127). Although there is a certain amount of idealizing involved in Woolf's and Merleau-Ponty's depictions of the painter's world view, their imaginative projections nonetheless enable them to articulate more clearly how perception is an embodied interaction with the world. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the visual artist has "the gift of the visible," even as this ability is "earned by exercise" (127). Woolf proposes that the best way to experience an exhibition of Sickert's paintings would be to become a fruit fly, which experiences the chaos of colour wholly through its sight-processing organs.

Woolf expresses a similar sentiment through the character of Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*. As Lily paints by the shore at the end of the novel, she reflects upon the difficult plight of apprehending her memories of Mrs. Ramsay:

> What was the problem then? She must try to get hold of something that evaded her. It evaded her when she thought of Mrs. Ramsay; it evaded her now when she thought of her picture. Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get a hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything. [. . .] One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. (158,161)

Woolf asserts that the painter's unique gift of vision is cultivated over a lifetime, and whether it is, to use Merleau-Ponty's phrasing, "precocious or belated, spontaneous or cultivated in museums," that ability can only be developed by giving over repeatedly to the bodily mechanisms of perception ("Eye" 127).

Although Merleau-Ponty asserts that a person's embodied state of being in the world is for the most part unconscious, or pre-reflexive, emphasizes that it is fundamentally a "creative action, in that it filters out certain things and focuses its attention on others" (Quinn 11). The outcome of Merleau-Ponty's creative intentionality is not Kant's abstract interiority, but rather an intuitive bodily engagement with the non-cognitive elements of our lived experience, which in turn allows for a more heightened, more enriched, and "more truthful" understanding of our intellectual connection with the world (Quinn 11). To explain his idiosyncratic approach to the mind/body connection, Merleau-Ponty again relies on the creative process of Cézanne. In "Cézanne's Doubt," he argues that at the core of Cézanne's painting practice is both an essential and, at times, debilitating contradiction because he aims to represent "reality while denying himself the means to attain it" (3). In part, what Merleau-Ponty is referring to is Cézanne's rejection of the Baroque traditions of the Renaissance, which were concerned primarily with methods that depicted illusory spaces on canvas (one-point perspective, chiaroscuro, colour blending). Instead, Cézanne sought to develop a style of painting that both revelled in the physical qualities of paint, the "sensuous surface," while at the same time sought tenaciously for ways to represent the experience of nature (3). Cézanne's rejection of artistic conventions compares to Woolf's resolute denial of the formulaic norms of the Edwardian novelists in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Similar to Woolf, who argues in her essay that through their

experiments, Georgian novelists disclose the fragmented, yet vital, aspects of lived experience, Merleau-Ponty asserts that Cézanne's paradoxical pursuit of representing the "immediate impression of nature" while abandoning established perspectival systems and compositional formulas is what Émile Bernard dubbed "Cézanne's suicide" ("Doubt" 3). Cézanne's paintings at first glance appear to be compositionally distorted because he utilized neither the carefully plotted arrangements and paint techniques of Baroque traditions, nor committed himself to the aims of the Impressionists, who were "trying to capture, in the painting, the very way in which objects strike our eyes and attack our senses" through an unwavering method of observation (2). In this way, his still-life paintings are examples of the kind of reorganization of form that Merleau-Ponty is attempting to describe in his essay. For instance, in *Still Life with Compotier* (1882), Cézanne constructs a scene in which every compositional element – ten round fruits of varying hues of green and orange; a cluster of dark green grapes; a butter knife; a folded white cloth; a wine glass half-filled with a transparent liquid; a wide-brimmed ceramic bowl on a thin pedestal base; a blue-green wall with decorative flower and leaf shapes – is treated with a controlled yet vigorous and thickly applied treatment of paint. The visible patterns and swatches of directional brush-strokes, and the bold application of colour serve as structural elements that lead the eyes through the passages in the painting. At the same time, this purposeful unification of compositional parts anchors the gaze so the viewer might comprehend the picture as a whole. Indeed, if Cézanne had relied on value and line alone to resolve the composition, the image would undoubtedly appear unbalanced or, at the very least, unfinished. For instance, the areas of shadow, created by thickly layered strokes of complementary colours, are organized not so much to create an effect of three-dimensional space, as one might see in a Baroque painting, but rather to reinforce the presence of bright oranges and reds, as well as the highly tinted passages. The image shifts and pulsates as the eye moves back and forth between areas that are either dimensionally flat or defined, surfaces that are either calm or agitated, and hues either saturated or muted. The overall effect is that the seemingly competing visual attributes combine rhythmically to create a sensual jigsaw puzzle of paint on canvas. In this way, Cézanne was attempting to achieve a more nuanced and multifaceted representation of his experience of the world. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> He did not want to separate the stable things which we see and the shifting way in which they appear. He wanted to depict matter as it takes on form, the birth of

> order through spontaneous organization. He makes a basic distinction not between "the senses" and "the understanding" but rather between the spontaneous organization of the things we perceive and the human organization of ideas and sciences. ("Doubt" 4)

Merleau-Ponty asserts that the synthesis of the intellect and the senses that Cézanne aimed to achieve in his painting parallels the intentionality of experience that "establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life" (*PhP* xxxii). Significantly, that unity can be glimpsed through art that is itself unified according to the viewer's embodied response rather than an eye educated in traditional reception strategies. In an echo of that viewing experience, through observing the world around him, Cézanne painted a perpetually shifting panorama of visual distortions and illusions that required a conscious loosening of any preordered judgments and artistic techniques. In this way, individual sensations, like those prompted by the colour and texture of an apple on a table or a familiar scene in nature,[6] over time become embedded in the intentional arc of lived experience and provide clarity, coherence, and meaning when interpreting with paint on canvas the unordered nature of immediate perceptions.

Cézanne's distinctive methods for seeing and especially translating the sensations of experience may be compared with Woolf's attempt in "A Sketch of the Past" to reconcile the inherent contradiction between art and lived experience. In the first passage of her memoir, Woolf draws the reader's attention to the challenges of writing a biographical work. She stresses that whether it be the life of an intimate friend – she was writing *Roger Fry* at the time – or an autobiography, the life-writer has an overwhelming amount of raw material (memories, sensations, opinions, projections) from which to pull ("Sketch" 64). Because of this overload of information, the writer chooses memories selectively, yet intuitively, and arranges them in such a way that the reader is compelled to be led from one scene to the next by the cascading momentum of association and cross-reference: "So without stopping to choose my way, in the sure and certain knowledge that it will find itself – or if not it will not matter – I begin" (64). By presenting moments and memories separated by time, Woolf's descriptions of her recollected

[6] Cézanne frequently visited Mont. Sainte-Victoire in Aix. Near the end of his life, this location became the subject of a series of paintings and water-colour sketches. *Mont Sainte-Victoire and Château Noir* (1904-06) and *Monte Sainte-Victoire Seen from Bibémus Quarry* (1897) are two of the more well-known works in this series (Rewald 239-246).

past create a sensory gallery that are perceived and reexperienced by the narrative presence. The first memory of sitting on her mother's lap is wholly visual. The description of her mother's dress, "of red and purple flowers on a black ground," suggests the experience of being proximally engulfed by a still-life painting: "I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose" (64). This description is reminiscent of passages in *Kew Gardens* where Woolf draws the reader under the shade of plants and flower petals to examine the different ways sunlight reflects upon the surfaces of objects such as pebbles and snail shells.

Woolf describes her second memory as it encapsulates the previous one: "If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills – then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory" ("Sketch" 64). Like the first memory, this scene is a sensory-filled moment of being half-conscious, but feeling and perceiving vividly the sensations of sound and light – the splashing of the waves and the morning light coming through a window as the blind is moved by a breeze – as she lies in a bedroom in St. Ives. It is apparent from the outset that Woolf is concerned quite profoundly with how the body and the information it stores can be divined by the memoirist. At the same time, she is highly skeptical whether it is indeed possible to represent accurately a life lived by a particular body through time, an endeavour which she believes is especially difficult for a woman. In a public talk, "Professions for Women" (1931), Woolf discusses two primary challenges faced by a professional woman writer: "The first – killing the Angel in the House – I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet. The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful" (144). Ironically, these very obstacles may have contributed to Woolf's ongoing concern with the body and its interactions with the world, both in her memoir and in her fiction. One of her preoccupations in "A Sketch of the Past" is considering how the body and the sensory world might be imaginatively represented: "But it is more convenient artistically to suppose that we are going to St. Ives, for that will lead to my other memory, which also seems to be my first memory, and in fact it is the most important of all my memories" (64). Though readings of the text as a trauma narrative are important to note and have

been noted by a range of critics, [7] it is as crucial to mention that beyond enabling Woolf to describe the details of sensory memories, the body as regarded by the memorist is also a catalyst that provides a way of ordering the world, of segueing from one moment to the next, of bringing psychic closure to the past, and of opening up new creative trajectories to explore.

Thus another way Woolf resists convention in "A Sketch of the Past" is by rendering, purposefully and self-consciously, a life through a relatively small collection of embodied memories, and through how she understands and represents her physical entanglement with the past, as well as her internal and emotional responses at the time and after, and her body' relations to the external spaces of her youth. This intensified focus on representing embodied perception establishes indeterminacies and limitations that autobiography as a genre has tended to avoid. Nora Séllei argues that autobiography has a long-standing tradition of favouring the abstract constructs of the mind over the sensual world. She writes that this convention reinforces a "structural principle in Western (philosophical) thinking of the binary opposition of the body and the mind, where the two elements are not simply situated appositionally, but also entail hierarchical value judgements in that the mind is superior to the body" (40). Woolf articulates the ramifications of this dualistic paradigm in her essay, *On Being Ill*:

> Literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and, save for one or two passions such as desire and greed, is null, and negligible and non-existent. On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February. The creature within can only gaze through the pane – smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant; it must go through the whole unending procession of changes, heat and cold, comfort and discomfort, hunger and satisfaction, health and illness, until there comes the inevitable catastrophe; the body smashes itself to smithereens, and the soul (it is said) escapes. (4-5)

[7] See Louise DeSalvo's *Virginia Woolf: the Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (1989).

To recognize that the body is, as Woolf and Séllei argue, a manifestation of myriad social, literary, and artistic "discourses," means to perceive how the body "haunts the genre of autobiography, either because of its exclusion, or because of the discursive parallels between the creation of the body and the subject of autobiography" (Séllei 40). Interpreting the ambiguous spaces in the text, between the sensations of memory and the rhetorical nature of language, requires both a philosophical and artistic method that allows for a fluid reciprocity between the autobiographical self and the imaginatively perceived, yet physically embedded, experiences of the past.

This is where Woolf and Merleau-Ponty can be read through each other, since both demonstrate as well as claim that the artistic synthesis between the thinking self and the sensing body does not result in a static end-product. Throughout his writings, Merleau-Ponty attempts to obscure the distinction between the transient and the concrete ways in which an individual perceives the world and to prove that embodied perception it is a process that unfolds over time. As Ulrika Maude writes, his claim was that the "world therefore is not ready-made but rather built up in a dialectical movement between the incarnate subject and the world" (14). Likewise, Woolf is aware throughout "A Sketch of the Past" of the futility of attempting to write a complete or final or static picture of her life. While aware of the traditions and forms of biography and autobiography with which she interacts over the course of her writing career, she focuses on the memories foremost in her mind and allows them to unearth the sensations not according to a pre-determined system but through "spontaneous" formation (Merleau-Ponty, "Doubt" 3). She is acutely aware of the fundamental contradiction lying beneath her attempts to write a life, drawing attention to the process of composition. Believing that lived experience is a process, her "Sketch" is a rendering of life that aims to represent its ambiguity, while not losing sight of the concrete structures that support and maintain the artistic vision.

In her memoir, Woolf is engaged persistently in an effort to bring into being the impressions and residues of past sensations. A passage that illustrates this struggle describes an experience of sexual abuse at the hands of her step-brother, George Duckworth. Certainly, the trauma embedded in the memory is what makes it an intense reminder of a powerful and powerfully disturbing moment in time for Woolf. However, by the time she writes her memoir, she claims enough distance from the event to treat it with the objectivity of an artist:

> I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it – what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. (69)

Woolf's recollection is thoughtfully constructed, both in its stylistic pacing (repeated words and phrases that build tension through syntactical layering), and its use of expressive verb forms ("stiffened;" "wriggled;" "approached;" "explored;" "resenting;" "disliking"). Though the tone is objective, and the emotional response of the memorist held at a distance through the question mark, the reading is anything but. It is also a reflexive experiment: Woolf is as curious about the act of creative recollection as she is about the memory itself. This conscious endeavour to give concrete shape to memory aligns with Henri Bergson's[8] consideration that the act of recollecting the past is "reproductive in operation" (Casey 39). In other words, "remembering, if it is to work at all, must replicate past events in an explicitly representational format" (39). Woolf's description of a memory in the above passage oscillates between two kinds of recollecting, what Bergson called "habit memory" and "image memory" (*Matter and Memory* 89-90). She starts with the reproduced images of her trauma, the sensations her mind identified, and the ways in which she remembers responding to the event with her body. She then shifts into a reflective mode of thought and invokes an image of a universal self: "This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched; how it is wrong to allow them to be touched; must be instinctive. It proves that Virginia Stephen was not born on the 25th of January 1882, but was born many thousands of years ago; and had from the very first to

[8] I mention Bergson here because Woolf was profoundly influenced by his thinking, in particular his philosophy of time – (see Ann Banfield's "Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time" [2003]). Merleau-Ponty had a more "ambivalent" relationship with Bergsonian theories. Although he seemed to follow "his own generation's tendency to dismiss Bergson's philosophy as overly intellectualist [. . .] [b]y the early 1950s, [he] had come to appreciate a certain ambiguity in Bergson's thought, identifying an important philosophy of expression in his early writings [. . .] and a later positive reading of early Bergson in 'Bergson in the Making' (1959)" (Landes 30). Nonetheless, my overall argument suggests that in their respective disciplines both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty construct pathways – between thought and sensation, and lived experience and artistic representation – that simultaneously embrace and extend beyond the essentially dualistic structures of Bergsonian thought.

encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancestresses in the past" (69). However, Woolf is careful not to create a tidy formula, and she immediately follows up with a concluding statement that offers no solution: "The person is evidently immensely complicated. Witness the incident of the looking-glass. Though I have done my best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face I have only been able to discover some possible reasons; there may be others; I do not suppose that I have got the truth; yet this is a simple incident; and it happened to me personally; and I have no motive for lying about it" (69). In light of this passage, Woolf's creative act of recording memory may expand from Bergson's theories, but is perhaps more comparable to and anticipatory of Merleau-Ponty's concept of bodily intentionality. This "simple incident" is the culmination of a host of past experiences lived by her body, which have been gathered and entwined together through a non-cognitive "dialectic of milieu and action" performed over the course of her life (*PhP* 169).

The uncertainty Woolf expresses about the self, about memory, and about the act of recollecting moves beyond the dualistic clarity of Bergsonian paradigms. She is a vagabond in a territory without outlines. Her relived experience through the act of writing is much the same as Merleau-Ponty's description of Cézanne's condition as a painter:

> What he expresses cannot, therefore, be the translation of a clearly defined thought, since such clear thoughts are those that have already been said within ourselves or by others. 'Conception' cannot precede 'execution.' Before expression, there is nothing but a vague fever, and only the work itself, completed and understood, will prove that there was something rather than nothing to be found there. ("Doubt" 7)

As Carolyne Quinn explains, Merleau-Ponty believes this "embodied world-structuring" is enacted through a "primordial awareness": "the body operates amongst and upon other persons, things, and situations without being explicitly conscious of the fact that it is doing so" (11). In this way, the "action" of representing life is continually in a state of flux: it will never be wholly realized, nor will it ever arrive at a state of completion (11). Similarly, the perpetual state of indeterminacy in "A Sketch of the Past," which "oscillates between the possibility and the impossibility of the representation of the body" (Séllei 38), is enriched by Woolf's continual engagement with the language and theories of visual art. Two pages into her memoir Woolf reflects:

> If I were a painter I should paint these impressions in pale yellow, silver, green. There was the pale yellow blind; the green sea; and the silver of the passion flowers. I should make a picture that was globular; semi-transparent. I should make a picture of curved petals; of shells; of things that were semi-transparent; I should make curved shapes showing the light through; but not giving a clear outline. Everything would be large and dim; and what was seen would at the same time be heard; sounds would come through this petal or leaf – sounds indistinguishable from sights [. . .] the sounds seem to fall through an elastic, gummy air; which holds it up; which prevents it from being sharp and distinct. (66)

The description of synaesthesia in this passage operates as an artistic strategy for depicting the diffusive nature of memory. For the Bloomsbury painters, and likewise for Woolf, painting had a very similar function. Throughout "An Essay in Aesthetics," Roger Fry explains that a painting is not merely a copy or representation of reality, a formula that has been commonly agreed upon, but rather an engagement with the materiality of being that allows access to an alternate and parallel reality. For instance, many of Walter Sickert's paintings – *The Beribboned Washstand* (1903); *Woman in Profile With Downcast Eyes* (1905); *La Nera* (1903) – are canvases built up with cross-hatched brush marks and alternating patches of saturated and neutralized colour that optically knit together. The viewer experiences a hazy composition in which a variant world emerges without "clear outline[s]" (Woolf, "Sketch" 66). Likewise, in her description of how she would apprehend the world through the eyes of a painter, Woolf argues that rather than presenting a fully realized structure, a written work should instead be a scaffolding constructed by an array of techniques and methods; it should be realized through a thoughtful reorganization of what the senses actually perceive with the effects these physical sensations have upon the imagination. In this way, much like the effect of Sickert's paintings, a more expansive and multi-dimensional experience is provided for the reader or viewer, and it is one that can evoke contradictory sensations and emotions in relation to the same work of art.

Woolf's imagined proposition – "If I were a painter" ("Sketch" 66) – outlines her philosophy of perception from an alternate perspective and connects to her statement that "[a]t times I can go back to St. Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. . . Now, if this is so, is it not possible – I often wonder – that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our

minds; are in fact still in existence?" (67). This philosophical quandary brings us back to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of intentionality, that reality is an ever-present and ever-transforming conglomerate of relations between the past, present, and future. A memory, for instance, is not simply a repetition of an isolated event but rather a moment that both retains and projects past and future horizons. Merleau-Ponty evokes a poignant image of such when he writes, "I am a field, I am an experience. One day, and indeed once and for all, something was set in motion that, even during sleep, can no longer cease seeing or not seeing, sensing or not sensing, suffering or being happy, thinking or resting, in a word, that can no longer cease 'having it out' with the world" (*PhP* 429). This metaphor of a field of presences is also explored in his analysis of Cézanne's painting method. "Cézanne's Doubt" echoes Woolf's reflections on painting, especially where Merleau-Ponty draws upon the visual arts to illustrate and augment his philosophy:

> [I]t is Cezanne's genius that when the overall composition of the picture is seen globally, perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to an impression of an emerging order, an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes. In the same way, the contour of an object conceived as a line encircling the object belongs not to the visible we but to geometry. (4)

Similar to Woolf's "semi-transparent" and "elastic" zones of sights and sounds ("Sketch" 66), Merleau-Ponty's description of a painter's perception suggests a world animated and vibrating with myriad colours, sounds, and odours ("Doubt" 4). He argues that Cézanne defied the constraining attributes of an outline in a painting: rather than defining a shape with a line or dramatic chiaroscuro, he suggested the "swell of the object" with multiple brush-strokes and hues so that "[r]ebounding among these, one's glance captures a shape that emerges from them all, just as it does in perception" (4). This holistic understanding of perception accepts that we have the capacity to perceive the surfaces, textures, and even the smell of objects. Furthermore, Cézanne believed that in order for a painter to be successful in representing reality, they must think of it as an "endless task": every colour, brushstroke, shape, and texture must "satisfy an infinite number of conditions" (5). These conditions are rooted in the body and its positioning in the world.

Understanding and translating how the body draws meaning from its experiences is, according to Merleau-Ponty, the primary aim of a painter. However, for an artist of any kind, this process is fraught with challenges. As Jessica Wiskus articulates it, this "paradox" of perception

"is one of distance and proximity: there is always a noncoincidence between ourselves and the totality of the world, viewed as depth; yet, at the same time, we owe our remarkable contact with the world to the implication of our body within it – we are of the world" (25). In light of this condition of implicitness and separateness, an artist, whose goal is to capture the flux of lived experience into a static material format, whether it be paint on canvas or words on the page, must be willing to embrace the perpetually obscure and unfinished nature of perception and see it reflected in their art.

Merleau-Ponty concludes in "Eye and Mind" that in order for artists to translate this essential indeterminacy of being they must recognize that the body is "[v]isible and mobile [. . .] a thing among things; it is one of them. It is caught up in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex of prolongation of itself; they are incrusted in the flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the very stuff of the body" (125). The implication of this passage is that art, like the body, is permeated with the same substance of the world, and operates as yet another "thing among things" (125). It exists within the intentional circle of the body that created it, and it projects a halo of influence around itself. In this way, the act of artistic representation involves both an absorption of our lived experience and a projection of invisible coordinates and indefinite boundaries that draw our attention to the possibilities of what our body has experienced and what it is yet to encounter. Near the end of "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf writes that this process, what she calls "scene-making," is not "a means of summing up and making innumerable details visible in one concrete picture" (122). Rather, the instances and elements of our perceptual world are both immutable and indelible; they operate as "representative" and "enduring" markers for the paths our bodies have tread. As Woolf writes, "[t]his confirms me in my instinctive notion: (it will not bear arguing about; it is irrational) the sensation that we are sealed vessels afloat on what it is convenient to call reality; and at some moments, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is, these scenes – for why do they survive undamaged year after year unless they are made of something comparatively permanent?" (122). Woolf's analogy of the fluid yet "permanent" matter of reality rushing into the cracked container of the perceiving self reinforces Merleau-Ponty's assertion that the

perceiving body is indeed an expanding entity annexing itself to the intentionality of objects[9] even as these objects join to its own arc of experience.

The essential paradox of being and representing is that one's freedom as a human and as an artist is wholly contingent upon one's ties to this world. Merleau-Ponty uses Cézanne as a template to illustrate this phenomenological dilemma:

> But he himself was never at the centre of himself: nine days out of ten all he saw around him was the wretchedness of his empirical life and of his unsuccessful attempts, the debris of an unknown celebration. Yet it was in the world that he had to realize his freedom, with colors upon a canvas. It was from the approval of others that he had to await the proof of his worth. That is why he questioned the picture emerging beneath his hand, why he hung on the glances other people directed toward his canvas. That is why he never finished working. We never get away from our life. We never see ideas or freedom face to face. ("Doubt" 11)

I argue that both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty were aware of the contradictory conditions inherent in artistic creation. They understood that an artist questions his or her own actions and decisions in every step of the creative process as a way to understand the uniqueness of the artistic vision, while at the same time comprehending the perspectives of others and of the world. Merleau-Ponty's writings explore how works of art reveal the relations and significations of objects in reality more profoundly than any particular aesthetic or philosophical theory, and suggest that acts of creation provide a range of strategies for understanding and giving shape to the ambiguities of existing in the body. Likewise, Woolf was a writer who learned to see the world through the eyes of a painter. Her ability to traverse artistic disciplines enabled her to explore the possibilities and indeterminacies of being. Over time she developed a proficiency for depicting

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[9] This concept will be examined in more detail in the chapters on *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway.* For now, it is important to know that Merleau-Ponty's assertion that intentional beings live in a world of intentional objects enabled a significant shift in phenomenology away from purely mentalistic formulations of being in the world. Indeed, as Galen Strawson confirms, many present-day philosophers accept that things such as "robots and pictures" and "computers and books" can "be in intentional states or 'have' intentionality even if they are not mental beings" (44). Strawson explains that "the problem of intentionality is nothing other than the problem of how natural phenomena can be about things or of things. Intentionality is thus equated with aboutness-or-ofness," which Strawson calls "*aboutness* for short," and concludes it "follows immediately" that "non-mental entities can have intentionality" (44).

the obscure through language because she learned how to repeatedly step back from the canvas of her chosen art form, and to perceive the ever-changing details of her existence from alternate perspectives. Similar to Cézanne, Woolf understood that the creative process constitutes a perpetually absurd condition wherein the artist is neither wholly free from, nor wholly defined by, a world made up of specific situations, things, actions, and vantage points. The artist must choose her own defining trajectories of representation while all the time recognizing that she is, in the words of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "'a knot of relations'" entwined in the net of lived experience (qtd. in *PhP* 483).

Part 2

Writing is Perceiving: Representation and Being in Woolf's Prose Fiction

2.1 Rooms of Cambridge: the Solid Indeterminacy of Space in *Jacob's Room*

Woolf's fascination with the interstices between human perception and the phenomena of the world is evidenced by the complicated representations of bodies in space that pervade her prose fiction. In *Jacob's Room*, her first sustained experimental work, Woolf incorporates a significant number of strategies for representing the internal experiences of her characters as they engage physically and psychologically with the spaces of London against the backdrop of World War I. Woolf's explorations of spatial perception in the story foreground themes, such as time, consciousness, and embodiment, which she ruminates upon throughout her writing career. By compositing a visual language existing on a spectrum between clarity and ambiguity, Woolf establishes a field of narrative structures in which the characters' perceptions are not wholly contingent upon a sensorial apprehension of the subjects of their world, nor reliant completely upon an abstract geometric conception of spatial dimensions and forms. In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf finds a shifting synthesis between form and content, one that reflects what Merleau-Ponty calls a "first-hand experience of space," which can be understood neither by "the consideration of contents" exclusively, nor by "some pure unifying activity," but rather by the body's capacity to simultaneously live in and reflect upon the world in which it moves (*PhP* 248). As Diana Coole attests, "this is what is achieved by recognizing the body as 'the pivot of the world' and nature as a phenomenal field inhabited by bodies" (93). It is a "generative, self-transformative, and creative materiality without relying on any metaphysical invocation of mysterious, immaterial forces or agencies" (93). In her approach to the character of Jacob, Woolf's phenomenological writing represents the incongruous spatiality of lived experience as it is shaped and anchored by the body in the natural world and by the conscious mind.

Jacob's Room is at once an episodic collection of disparate vignettes and a philosophical exposé of the sensory and psychic impressions of its characters. The stylistic moves Woolf achieves in this work hinge in large part upon the embodied thoughts and implied movements of Jacob Flanders. A number of scholars have recognized how Woolf uses Jacob as a formal device for the elegiac thrust of the novel. Because his absence is more prevalent than his presence in the text, he is understood through Woolf's descriptions of the spaces in which he inhabits, the varied perspectives of other characters, and the omniscient narrator. Much like her strategy in "A Mark

on the Wall," Woolf's storytelling method in *Jacob's Room* concretizes the details of the scenes, which are augmented by what Kathleen Wall calls the "preponderance of visual images," and which foreground the boundaries of the viewer's perception (306). In other words, these methods commingle and juxtapose internal reflections and perceptual observations, and they blur the distinctions between imaginative notions of physical reality and language that denote what Elicia Clements calls a "locatable materiality" (71). The balance of the novel is dependent upon almost constant fluctuations of perspective, which create the impression that life is only fragmentarily perceived, and which serve to disperse Jacob's presence in the text. Indeed, and echoing Kimberly Engdahl Coates's exploration of "queer" spatiality in Woolf's prose, Jacob's orientation is constantly in flux, and yet, Woolf requires the reader to view him as a pole which is at the centre of her constructed world, as a consciousness that is persistently attempting to find self-possession in the midst of social and professional "disorientation" (276). The vacillating vantage points that constitute Jacob's phenomenal sphere display multiple gestalts of thought and sensation, and suggest the reader's own involvement with the distinctions and ambiguities between the formal parameters of the text and the seemingly varied impressions of the world it represents.

Other scholars have explored Woolf's emphasis on depicting not a static world, but rather characters' shifting relations in and to a changing society. Because the narrative exists outside of Jacob Flanders' conscious mind, and because the story's plot is non-linear, a degree of estrangement supports Woolf's commentary on gender inequality. As Morris observes, women "are treated contemptuously by Jacob and his friends, regarded as lesser beings, lacking spirituality and necessary mainly for sexual pleasure" (3). In part, this is a critique of the "cult of Hellenism" promoted at institutions such as Cambridge in the early twentieth century, which fostered the "elevation of the mind (invariably masculine) above the body (usually female)" (3). It is also an examination of the devastating effects of World War I that had either levelled or brought into question nearly all of the societal and political certainties of traditional Victorian class and gender structures. Here is where Morris's conception of "worldly realism" is instructive, particularly where Woolf's style moves so very much beyond the illusions or conventions of verisimilitude. Morris identifies that in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf is presenting an "anti-idealist, egalitarian, horizontal regime of representation" — what Rancière calls the "dissensual" aesthetic as it diverges not just from cultural tradition but also from the ideologies

that such tradition tacitly reinforces (21). Jacob is positioned in such a way that nearly all of his societal prejudices and personal limitations are brought to the surface: he is neither a stock villain nor a heroic protagonist invested with "exceptional inner nobility," as is often the case in the novels of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy (10). Instead of a character determined by and reaffirming a clear distinction between what is "meaningful" and what is "non-sense" (6), Jacob suggests a self swept up in a world of other selves and, crucially, other things. In other words, Woolf is offering a challenge to the hierarchical subject-object paradigm by engaging with a "dissensual regime of the perceptible," through which she "brings into visibility this inseparable interdependence of the mental with the physical realm, radically overturning the foundational distinction of idealist ideology" (21). Therefore, what is read as real or as reality in *Jacob's Room* are the characters' experiences and encounters with a material world that is continuous with and in relation to the characters themselves. Their perceptions are as wide-ranging in mode, and include the disillusionments and uncertainties resulting from the cracking apart of their "consensual" ideologies: but even more important are the ways in which these uncertainties intersect and juxtapose with their empirical lives. By presenting characters who perceive, affect, and are affected by the material hardships of a society in which traditions overlap with change, Woolf depicts an imperialist and patriarchal order that is pulling apart at its seams as it moves to war.

My examination of *Jacob's Room*, then, engages with how Woolf's techniques represent a realism that exists through both thought and sense; a realism that, in Morris's sense of the term, "conveys a materialist, non-hierarchical and encompassing perception of existence," or "horizontal continuity of self, social world and physical universe" (5). My argument is that Woolf's approach involves a philosophical exploration of embodied spatiality through the experiences of characters living in a specific temporal space. My investigation of Woolf's constructions of space is guided by Merleau-Ponty's assessment of spatial perception, that a body experiences its surroundings "on the hither side of the distinction between form and content"(*PhP* 248). In chapter 2 of part 2 of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty constructs what he considers to be an understanding of space that operates via a synthesis between the content of perception — the physical matter we encounter — and the "form of perception," or the experience of apprehending this matter (243). He argues that some of the

philosophers who preceded him, Immanuel Kant[1] and Henri Bergson[2] in particular, have firmly established the idea that our perceptual engagement with the world is generated and organized by our consciousness, a construct that denotes a fundamental separation between our perception and the contents of the world. As Merleau-Ponty writes, the "classical conception [. . .] defines consciousness as an absolute non-being, and correspondingly consigns its contents to a 'hyletic layer' [sensory matter] which belongs to opaque being" (243). Conversely, Merleau-Ponty argues that "[s]pace has its basis in our facticity" and that, consequently, our perceptual bodies are constituted through a multi-faceted and contradictory engagement with the world (254). Put in another way, Merleau-Ponty's conception of space involves the perceiving human as a necessary coordinate among the dimensions of height, width, and breadth.

While Merleau-Ponty's approach would seem predicated upon a universalized sense of that perceiving figure — the autonomous white male subject — the potential of his work in relation to Woolf stems from how perceptions are part of a larger field and process: the subject's continual organization of impressions. This is where the structure as well as the style of *Jacob's Room* can be seen to rest upon multiple, associative moments of embodiment. Ann Banfield proposes that Woolf eventually endeavoured to create a prose form that expanded upon the single descriptive scenes developed in her earlier short narratives. She suggests that the depicted units of time in her stories, and in sections of *Jacob's Room*, hold a self-contained universe of impressions that ideally do not have any "relation with any other moment" (486). Banfield writes that "[i]t is through 'the moment' that [Woolf] works out her literary impressionism. A unit of

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[1] In *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant defines our world as the "sum of meaningful objects," which suggests that the objective phenomena in our lives is "constructed according to a human conception" (Landes 56). Merleau-Ponty's critique of this theory is that Kant fails to explain the resistance of the natural world, what Kant refers to as the "residue that we cannot eliminate . . . , the romantic idea of a savage Nature" (qtd. in Landes 56).

[2] According to Merleau-Ponty, Bergson "proceeds [to understand space and movement] by way of dilution, speaking of consciousness as if it were a liquid in which instants and positions dissolve. In it he looks for an element in which their dispersal is really abolished" (*PhP* 276). Merleau-Ponty argues that to completely dispel the multiplicity involved in our experience of time, motion, and space, that if our consciousness is wholly "undivided," as Bergson hopes to prove, then our experience of perceiving the world is determined by an "incommunicable quality," a homogeneity that can only reference itself and has no solid basis in the phenomenal facts of our environment (276).

experienced time rooted in the present of the world of existence, the present moment is conceived as an Impressionist canvas which close inspection reveals as atomized" (486). This notion of the fragmented or "atomized" nature of perception was developed by the Cambridge philosophers, most notably Bertrand Russell. In *An Outline of Philosophy*, Russell argues that perception is determined and constructed by the associations and cues given to us by our consciousness. According to him, our senses have a very small role to play in our perceptual reality:

> Innumerable objects are in our field of vision, but only some (at most) are interesting to us. If someone says 'look, there's a snake,' we adjust our eyes afresh and obtain a new 'sensation.' Then, when the purely visual part is finished, there are stimulations, by association, of other centres in the brain. There are pictures, in Kohler's book, of apes watching other apes on the top of insecure piles of boxes, and the spectators have their arms raised in sympathetic balancing movements. (65)

This sympathetic process, or "law of association," is what Russell considers to be the primary attribute of "living bodies," particularly in the way they can be distinguished from "scientific instruments" (63). He argues that perception offers more illusion than reality and that to depend upon it for an understanding of the world, or to use it as a basis for a philosophy, is like listening to a "pleasant fairy-tale" (72).

Although Russell's insistence on the importance of reflection and consciousness over the validity of the body and the sensory world conflicts with my reading of Woolf's prose, it is important to acknowledge that his reasoning was appealing to Woolf, especially because she was determined to find a method for representing lived realities in her fiction and was continually at odds with the results. In a diary entry in 1920, Woolf expresses both her excitement and uncertainty about writing a novel that depicts a range of sensations and thoughts without a conceivable plot structure:

> I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time; no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, passion, humour, everything, as bright as fire in the mist. Then I'll find room for so much—a gaiety—an inconsequence— a light spirited stepping at my sweet will. Whether I'm sufficiently mistress of things—that's the doubt; but conceive Mark on the Wall, Kew Gardens, and Unwritten Novel taking hands and dancing in unity. (*A Moment's Liberty* 100)

Woolf's strategy to construct a longer narrative out of individual and cohesive parts seems to align with Russell's assertion that one can only process "time's analyzed experiential discontinuity" through separate "noninterpenetrating temporal unit[s]" (Banfield 486). Interpreting *Jacob's Room* through Russell's theoretical lens is enlightening, particularly when attempting to understand its indeterminate and nonlinear plot structure. Woolf's vision of writing short and indistinct representations of being as they are linked side-by-side creates, in her mind, a fictional world that is saturated with possibilities and with multiple levels of potential readerly involvement in the world of the narrative.

Woolf's application of Russell's theories is most often suggested in *Jacob's Room* when the narrative voice interjects to draw attention to the reflective capacities of the conscious mind. An example is when the narrator describes the process of seeing through the eyes of an older woman in a passenger train: "Nobody sees anyone as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole – they see all sorts of things – they see themselves [. . .]. It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor entirely what is done" (22). Through the narrator, Woolf allows a reader to contemplate the philosophical nature of perception – to consider "both our feelings and our observations, both the known and the inferred, both what is present and what is absent" – as the scene itself, like the carefully composed design of a painting, guides a reader's focus in multiple directions (Wall 311). Woolf attests that the various meanings we attach to life are determined by our fluctuating modes of perception. This is why, as Wall suggests, "Woolf's narrator seeks, through the use of vivid, composed descriptive passages [. . .] to create both a momentary timelessness and an almost tragic fall back into time" (303). Therefore, the philosophical assertion in this passage is that reality is perceived via a process of association, by knitting, through reflection and abstract thought, discrete and vivid descriptions into a contingent but interpretable narrative shape.

Woolf admits in her 1920 journal entry that she might be lacking in the skill to create a believable and all-encompassing narrative without a conceivable structure. This may be why she was attracted to Russell's idea that experience provides more stimuli than the senses can process, that perception is a kind of "adaptation to the environment" of lived experience (Russell 65). It is not surprising that one of the prominent characters in the initial passages of *Jacob's Room* is a lone painter, Charles Steele. His attempt to paint Mrs. Flanders into the space of the beach

parallels Woolf's endeavour to render the character of Jacob Flanders into the many environments in the novel. Woolf seems to be aware that the artist, whether a painter or a writer, must find a balance between thought and sense, and careful observation and imposed design. The difficulty for both Woolf and Steele is in depicting a space that anchors the eye and mind with enough vivid description while also allowing for enough ambiguity to exist. An excess of detail causes subjects to appear superimposed onto their surroundings; too much blending in the description results in obscurity, or, in Steele's case, the overall picture appearing "pale" (4). It is doubtful that this "unknown" painter is ever successful with his portrait of Mrs. Flanders. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the challenges Steele encounters as an artist parallel Woolf's dilemma in representing the ever-fluctuating elements of lived experience through the mutable lens of human perception. In many respects, Steele can be read through Woolf's uncertainty about her own abilities as a writer. Using Russell's law of association, one might argue that Steele's potential failure as an artist would stem from an unwillingness to respond and adapt imaginatively to the changing phenomena of the natural world. The exasperated painter strikes his canvas with a "hasty violet-black dab" when Mrs. Flanders moves from her rock or looks in "horror" as a "cloud [moves] over the bay" just when he finds the "right tint" (4). However, in the end, Steele is "pleased by the effect of the black," for it is "just that note which [brings] the rest together" (4). Although this realization is due primarily to the serendipity of the moment, it requires objectivity on the part of the artist, an ability to apprehend the larger structure of the picture as it relates to each of its constituted parts.

As Banfield observes, Woolf is dependent to a considerable degree upon Russell's objective philosophy of perception in her early writing. *Jacob's Room*, with its atomized narrative structure and its succession of short scenes and passages, is an experiment that utilizes the tenets of Cambridge thought. Like a painter, Woolf struggles to realize the "black dab" when it occurs and to construct the narrative via an intellectual process of association (*JR* 4). In this light, Woolf is also indebted to Roger Fry's aesthetic theories in her ability to merge the elements of real and imaginative space in her representation of lived experience. Fry proposed that it was important for a painter to move beyond a predominantly figure/ground dynamic, wherein the composition is dictated by a formulated design that differentiates elements in the foreground and background in order to depict the illusion of a three-dimensional space. Likewise, Woolf develops an approach to writing that moves from the reliance on static moments of vivid

descriptions to a more fluid construct, which represents a moving panorama of perceptually apprehended images. However, while Woolf is attentive to Russell's mathematical philosophy and Fry's post-impressionist theories, she is at the same time developing her own unique template for an understanding of space. Although Russell and Fry do make attempts at creating a synthesis between the intellectual and physical aspects of space, and though Fry is enamoured by the idea of a marriage between the actual and the imaginative life, they build persistently upon a foundation that posits a one-to-one relation between phenomena and perception. While there are certainly instances in her fiction in which Woolf seems to favour intellectualism over the senses, she explores consistently strategies for representing the experience of Being-in-the-world and ways to continually reposition the reader in the world of the senses by depicting the objects and phenomena of lived experience. Indeed, there are numerous instances in her short stories and in *Jacob's Room* in which she is achieving a synthesis of spatial and temporal elements that reaches beyond the limits of Russell's and Fry's theories and illustrates her aptitude for writing phenomenological space.

In the opening passage of "Solid Objects," Woolf represents her characters as subjects whose movements and actions are essential components in the reader's apprehension of the depicted environment; it thus creates a relational dynamic that, in its emphasis on the visual, intersects with a painterly approach. Woolf begins the story with a description of a sand bar viewed from a distance. From the start, Woolf provides an aesthetic structure for the scene and leaves the contextual information unknown. With the exception of the word "beach," the first phrase uses primarily descriptive terminology: "The only thing that moved upon the vast semi-circle of the beach was one small black spot" (54). The dimensional relationship between the subjects ("vast semi-circle" and "small black spot"), and specifically the way one is positioned inside of another, implies a space with depth and breadth. Over the course of the paragraph, the black spot shifts into focus, implying a spatial movement from the background to the foreground: "As it came nearer to the ribs and spine of the stranded pilchard boat, it became apparent from a certain tenuity in its blackness that this spot possessed four legs; and moment by moment it became more unmistakable that it was composed of the persons of two young men" (54). Woolf integrates specific details ("stranded pilchard boat"; "two young men"; "walking stick") with more nondescript visual cues ("blackness"; "little round heads"; "long straight stripes"). The scene thus provides an experience based on a series of spatial and perspectival distortions, much

in the same way Merleau-Ponty describes the viewer's encounter with a painting by Cézanne: "It is why a disc placed obliquely to our face resists geometrical perspective, as Cézanne and other painters have shown by depicting a soup plate seen from the side with the inside still visible. It has been rightly said that, if perspective distortions were expressly given to us, we should not have to learn perspective" (*PhP* 260). Where Cézanne composes his images to prompt the viewer to intentionally reorganize the relations among objects in the picture, Woolf overlays distorted perceptual and intellectual cues in the first scene of "Solid Objects" to create an atmosphere that actively reforms the reader's conception of space. The result of her narrative's shifting spatial perspective is a kind of disorganized equilibrium, a sensation that is akin to the wonder involved in a body experiencing an unfamiliar environment for the first time.

Woolf's techniques for depicting a body in space in "Solid Objects" are extended in *Jacob's Room*. Impressionistic vignettes throughout the novel are saturated with descriptions of sensory interruptions and perspectival distortions, which continually reintroduce the reader to the process of perception, or the off-kilter and indefinable synthesis between thought and gesture, intention and experience. These strategies align with Merleau-Ponty's notion that space is determined by both the limitations of the perceiving body as well as the transcendence of the perceiving consciousness. In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf repeatedly tests the limits of representing how the body understands its experience in the perceptual world. Perhaps one of the more effective methods she employs is the use of light and shadow to create highly descriptive visual scenes, or what Wall refers to as "ekphrastic"[3] depictions of space. The following passage illustrates how Woolf utilizes contrasting visual elements of light and darkness to bring a scene into full relief, and exemplifies how she creates environments that resist a claim for truth in their emphasis on the movements of sensory phenomena, particularly the visual:

> The bareness of Mrs. Pearce's front room was fully displayed at ten o'clock at night when a powerful oil lamp stood on the middle of the table. The harsh light fell on the garden;

[3] Quoting Murray Kriegar, Wall writes that "a description invokes the 'ekphrastic principle' when 'the [literary work] takes on the 'still elements of plastic form which we normally attribute to the spatial arts'" (313). Wall goes on to explain that she uses the "theory of ekphrasis" to examine *Jacob's Room* because she encounters "certain moments of the text foregrounding this exchange between text and picture [. . .]. Such moments are elegiac by virtue of the way in which they temporarily freeze time, and then, upon releasing it, remind us that their timelessness is a fiction" (313).

> cut straight across the lawn; lit up a child's bucket and a purple aster and reached the hedge. [. . .] A daddy-long-legs shot from corner to corner and hit the lamp globe. The wind blew straight dashes of rain across the window, which flashed silver as they passed through the light. A single leaf tapped hurriedly, persistently, upon the glass. (7)

The scene is heightened by Woolf's varied and repeated descriptions of the light emanating from the oil lamp: "The light blazed out across the patch of grass; fell on the child's green bucket with the gold line around it, and upon the aster which trembled violently beside it" (8). When the lamp is "extinguished," Pearce's garden becomes a "dark patch" of existence (8). Woolf combines the unique quality of lamplight with elements that limit, or modify, the effect this light might have, such as the way the wind causes the rain to "[flash] silver" as it passes through the light (7). The result is containment, a space that is intimate, and that is defined by the parameters of a body perceiving the nuances of its environment. The light elements of light in these passages are also activated by the more invisible or seemingly unsubstantial actions of a breeze, which in another scene "stirred the cloth on the chest of drawers, and let in a little light, so the sharp edge of the chest of drawers was visible" (8). Woolf's deployment of the multi-faceted actions of the natural world establishes moments of temporal stasis: time slows down and becomes suspended so that the spaces are represented according to both external and internal modes of perception. In this way, *Jacob's Room* utilizes ekphrastic descriptions to create a phenomenological construct of space, in which a unifying pattern of past, present, and future is perceived in the movements of the characters among their various spheres of existence.

As a layer to her understanding and application of Cambridge philosophy, which posits that the world is perceived as a succession of atomized units of being, Woolf frequently displays the spaces in *Jacob's Room* as a fluctuating field of images that incorporate thoughts, memories, and internal reveries mingled with the immediate and concrete sensations of a body interacting with an environment. In the first passage of the novel, she presents a setting that is at once ambiguous and startlingly lucid in its visual elements. The mundane premise of the scene – Mrs. Flanders sitting on a beach and gazing at a passing boat while in the act of composing a letter – is complicated by Woolf's description, which draws attention to the network of threads that connects the movements and actions within the passage:

> Slowly welling from the point of her gold nib, pale blue ink dissolved the full stop; for there her pen stuck; her eyes fixed, and tears slowly filled them. The entire bay quivered;

> the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr. Connor's little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun. She winked quickly. Accidents were awful things. She winked again. The mast was straight; the waves were regular; the lighthouse was upright; but the blot spread. (3)

The scene begins and ends with the process of the bleeding inkblot: the slow "welling" of the ink mimics the tears veiling the subject's eyes. The pauses in the passage – Mrs. Flanders' pen on paper at the "full stop," and the fixation of her eyes – serve to ground the multiple layers of perception enacted in the scene and create a rhythm of static-ness and plasticity, interior thought and physical observation, abstraction and concretion. Each time Mrs. Flanders makes a perceptual adjustment to maintain equilibrium, there is an alternate perceptual dimension that counters and levels this intention. Mrs. Flanders fixes her eyes to see clearer, and the mast blurs and dissolves; she winks and has a thought unrelated to the scene around her; she winks again, and the mast transforms again. During these moments in time, the inkblot spreads outwards.

Jane Goldman, working from the scholarship of Edward Bishop and David Bradshaw, has observed that passages such as the one above demonstrate Woolf's strategy for using words, phrases, and blank spaces on the page of the text to suggest silences, fissures, or implicit cues that other meanings are possible. For instance, the use of the word "wink" — as opposed to blink — in the above passage suggests Woolf's tacit satire of the gendered roles in the novel. As Betty Flanders thinks about Seabrook dying in a shipwreck, the reader may read an inferred narrator winking back at the reader as though to dismiss the patriarchal notion that a woman's identity is subsumed by the memory of a man. In this way, some words can, according to Goldman, become "places in the novel where the reader may feel obliged to do some tunnelling behind or below what is actually uttered and printed on the page" ("Following" 36). Similar to Goldman and Bishop, I am intrigued by the ways in which Woolf uses gaps and silences to "not merely pace the reader" but to "allow his or her mind to move into the silence" (Bishop 31). While socio-political allusions created by the fissures in the text connect to the significance of Morris's approach to Woolf as she draws together rather than divides subject, object, environment, and embodied experience, my reading has more to do with the way Woolf's representational techniques and visuals implicate the characters' actions with the rhythms of their environments. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, such depictions and perceptions of depth should lead to another form of that challenge, where a phenomenological perspective should ideally implore the perceiver to

"reject the preconceived notion of the world and rediscover the primordial experience from which it springs" (*PhP* 256). This statement implies a kind of indefinable process by which the perceiver apprehends space, specifically, the dimension of depth, on a continuum that spreads in all directions towards a larger apprehension of self and world. Mrs. Flanders loses track of her positioning in relation to the subjects she perceives. As a subject herself, her perception spreads like the inkblot and her focus is maintained upon an unfolding encounter with the world through her senses.

Mrs. Flanders' interpenetrating engagement with the world as it is expressed in the opening passage appears throughout the story in brief instances, which, in an indirect sense, sets the stage for Jacob Flanders' diffuse presence in the narrative. Wall describes this diffusivity as the "Jacob-shaped hole that is often articulated by the limitations of the narrator's perspective, which focus more attention on a fragmented social context than on the character; and by empty rooms and empty shoes, closed doors and unknown thoughts" (306). Wall, among other scholars, argues that Jacob is a composite of his surroundings. He is revealed to the reader through the multifarious perspectives of other characters, and the omnipotent voice of the narrator, all of which establish an atmosphere, an elegiac pattern of presences that knit the disparate scenes in the novel:

> But something is always impelling one to hum vibrating, like the hawk moth, at the mouth of the cavern of mystery, endowing Jacob Flanders with all sorts of qualities he had not at all – for though, certainly, he sat talking to Bonamy, half of what he said was too dull to repeat; much unintelligible [. . .] what remains is mostly a matter of guess work. Yet over him we hang vibrating. (*JR* 61)

The proverbial "we" is implicated in Jacob's world much in the same way Mrs. Flanders "vibrates" in the first passage of the novel between the past and the present, between internal reverie and the physical sphere (57). Merleau-Ponty would describe this phenomenon as a process whereby the perceiver encounters "the feel of a world in which no two objects are seen simultaneously, a world in which regions of space are separated by the time it takes to move our gaze from one to the other, a world in which being is not given but rather emerges over time" (*WP* 54). Through vividly composed, yet often fragmented, descriptions of Jacob's world, Woolf implores the reader to compose a truth, an immediate and experience sense of the moment, based

purely on the details provided in the text rather than upon a prescriptive interpretation or that which is proper, conventional, and hegemonic in both form and content.

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf is experimenting with depictions of lived experience that blur the boundaries between the sensory realm and the perceiver's reflective capacities, creating transitions that are felt by the reader in their subtle imminence. In this way, Woolf is applying a structure of formal relations in the text that depicts reality as an ever-fluctuating and continuous field of impressions perceived by a body, or indeed bodies, rather than a world apprehended from above by the fixed and objective and authoritative point of view of an omniscient narrator. Merleau-Ponty proposes that if the human body is indeed an inseparable component in the process of perceiving the world then our encounter with space "announces a certain indissoluble link between things and myself by which I am placed in front of them" (*PhP* 256). This idea implies that if we rely solely on the abstract dimensions of geometry to understand our experience of space, we perceive a network of relationships between objects "in which the perceiving subject is not implied" (256). Merleau-Ponty argues that these empirical classifications of space, either the relations among the phenomena of the world or the geometrical set of coordinates that represents an intellectual understanding, fail to give us an account of the "human experience of the world" (255). Rather, he suggests that a more meaningful understanding of our ever-changing positioning within the world is achieved through a will to discover the body's experience of spatial relations, one that pre-empts and, consequently, dissolves the distinction between form and content (256). This conception of phenomenological space aligns with Clements' exploration of spatiality in Woolf's prose. focusing on Woolf's use of aurality and its "relationship to the built environment," or cityscapes, in *Jacob's Room* and *The Years* (71), Clements' distinguishes space from the term place: "Space refers to abstract notions of the physical environment, whereas place denotes the real-world manifestation of such concepts, a locatable materiality" (71). Clements suggests that Woolf's "deployment of sound in space and place" demonstrates another way that she "routinely disrupts presupposed boundaries between the conceptual and the physical domains" in order represent lived experience in a way that is neither formalized nor replicated (71-72). Again, it is a realism that diverges from tradition and convention through its engagement with perceptions of the world.

Clements' study of the aurality in Woolf's prose is thus another way to understand the phenomenological underpinning of the novel as her approach overlaps with Merleau-Ponty's

concept of existential unity. Throughout *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the body has a kind of spatiality, what he refers to as the "body-schema,"[4] which is an implicit and ever-changing awareness of the positioning and potential of *le corps propre*: "I perceive a thing because I have a field of existence, and because each phenomenon, on its appearance, attracts towards that field the whole of my body as a system of perceptual powers" (*PhP* 100; 370). This means that the body's act of perceiving other objects and phenomena in its "field of existence" redefines its relationship to its environment, and establishes itself as a pole of coordinates forever determining and determined by its surrounding poles. The contradictory premise of the body-schema is that our body is immersed in the world while also a separate entity amongst the objects within its environment. As A. D. Smith writes, "the spatiality of the body is not one of 'location,' but of 'situation.' [. . . .] To have a body-schema is to be in the world. And, conversely: the body is what it is by being 'polarised,' in the face of objects, by its tasks – which is the same as having (or being) an 'existence towards' objects" (16). Woolf replicates this contradictory condition of embodied perception in *Jacob's Room* by layering the multi-sensory aspects of a body experiencing its surroundings, which in turn allows her to knead together the disparate elements of the material and the abstract, and of sense and consciousness. For instance, when Jacob and Timmy Durrant are boating on the river Cam in the first section of the novel, the phenomena of sound and sight are combined in order to suggest the internal processes and reveries of the characters:

> The meadow was on a level with Jacob's eyes as he lay back; gilt with buttercups, but the grass did not run like the thin green water of the graveyard grass about to overflow the tombstones, but stood juicy and thick. Looking up, backwards, he saw the legs of children deep in the grass, and the legs of cows. Munch, munch he heard; then a short step through the grass; then again munch, munch, munch, as they tore the grass short at the roots. In front of him two white butterflies circled higher and higher round the elm tree." (29)

[4] Landes explains how the body-schema is an all-encompassing system of awareness: "For Merleau-Ponty, the body schema expresses not just our current position, but encompasses our lived possibilities such that it expresses our habits and our style of being-in-the world" (32). Therefore, when one is aware of a specific act or task the body is undergoing, this awareness references, and is determined by, the whole of one's lived existence. Hence, the ambiguity of our body, which is both a stable network of coordinates and an active space that enables the forming of new perceptual parameters and structures.

After this descriptive passage presented through Jacob's limited point of view, Timmy Durrant is described as looking up from a book and reflecting, "Jacob's off" (29). It suggests that Woolf is using the sensory phenomena in this scene to imply the transitions that are happening in Jacob's mind. This connection is evidenced by the way Woolf aligns each visual description with Jacob's line of sight, literally: "The meadow was on a level with Jacob's eyes." When Jacob changes his perspectival view, "[l]ooking up, backwards," a phenomenological distortion occurs: individual legs, sounds, and visual patterns converge and spread out like waves in a rhythmic succession of actions and movements. A passage such as this illustrates Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "every conceivable being is related either directly or indirectly to the perceived world," and that, conversely, "this cannot be a certain world, a certain spectacle, since we have put ourselves at the origin of all of them" (*PhP* 253). In light of the indeterminate spaces Woolf explores through her descriptions, Jacob's localization in the novel is diffused. At the same time, his ambiguity, what many have interpreted as his absence in the text, is determined, contradictorily, by his positioning as a pole at the centre of an ever-shifting spectacle of sight, sound, touch, reflection, and thought.

As both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty attest in their writings, there is a fundamental contradiction involved in Being-in-the-world where humans are at once objects and agents in the apprehension and reordering of the contents of our world. I assert that this phenomenological premise is the guiding philosophy of Woolf's prose fiction. Writing phenomenological space requires an author to devise characters that pulse and sway with the rhythms of their environments, and that carry forward elements of their past experiences into the present. For instance, Woolf demonstrates this strategy when she describes a boating trip to the Scilly Isles off the coast of Cornwall, wherein Jacob Flanders becomes increasingly immersed in the phenomena of his environment. The sensations and thoughts he experiences on the voyage become a thick field of impressions. Six days into the voyage, Jacob and Timmy stop on land to visit the Durrant family. Jacob wears a black dinner jacket as a way to find stability in a setting for which he does not feel socially equipped: "And now, the world being stable, lit by candle-light, the dinner jacket alone preserved him" (46). As the dinner scene unfolds, Woolf's descriptions become increasingly equivocal: the language is specific neither to one location, nor, seemingly, to one moment in time:

> Opposite him were hazy, semi-transparent shapes of yellow and blue. Behind them, again, was the grey-green garden, and among the pear-shaped leaves of the escallonia fishing

> boats seemed caught and suspended. A sailing ship slowly drew past the women's backs. Two or three figures crossed the terrace hastily in the dusk. The door opened and shut. Nothing settled or stayed unbroken. Like oars rowing now this side, now that, were the sentences that came now here, now there, from either side of the table. (47)

Sensory impressions from the boating excursion seem to be overlapped upon the present moment. Furthermore, colours, shapes, and movements from the interior rooms of the house are kneaded into and layered upon glimpses and impressions of the garden and the sea. Visual elements close at hand are "hazy" and "semi-transparent" and objects in the distance are integrated with figures in the foreground – "A sailing ship slowly drew past the women's backs" (47). As Jacob straddles two worlds of the sea voyage and the dinner party, space and time become embedded into a single and condensed field of perception. A pervading rhythm of movements and actions congeals the perceptual elements in the scene. The overall passage has a solubility, wherein Jacob is saturated by phenomena on all sides.

Woolf thus anchors Jacob in a narrative that is constructed primarily through descriptions of impressionistic detail rather than a conventional plot-line. In most instances in the novel, the reader is not provided with a complete nor constant set of parameters for Jacob's spatiality; this is also true regarding his personal world views and his sense of self in the midst of political and professional instabilities: hints and gesture take the place of authoritative narration or description of the character. Because of this, the multi-faceted nature of Jacob's contours and forms arises even as he is also propelled by a socially-enforced need to maintain an ideal of himself and his prescribed cultural trajectory as a Cambridge man ascending to great things, as representative of upper middle class Britain, as the autonomous male subject – "'I am what I am, and intend to be it'" (26). Of course, the path that Jacob follows is neither purposeful nor delineated, and, more often than not, his philosophical or existential assertions are complicated by the narrator's summations: "there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself" (26). Here, Coates's analysis of Woolf's use of space in her fiction helps to explain the social dimensions of Woolf's phenomenological writing, particularly where Coates draws upon Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*. Arguing that phenomenology is a lens to explore the way bodies will orient themselves when encountering what they deem to be "queer" constructions of time and space, Coates writes that "spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that 'unfolds in the folds of the body'" (277). One of the driving impetuses for Jacob is thus to realign

himself in the face of what he perceives to be the disorientating paradigms of modernity that surround him. Like the character John from "Solid Objects," Jacob retreats from the less-than-ideal realities of hegemonic career trajectories, political orientations, and social obligations. Though he will rebel against what he views as stultifying tradition by leveraging his own privilege to condemn it — "'Bloody beastly!' he said to Timmy Durrant, summing up his discomfort at the world shown him" at the Plumers' (28) — he also, and almost unconsciously, finds solace by enveloping himself in the physical spaces of his world:

> Every time he lunches out on Sunday – at dinner parties and tea parties – there will be this same shock – horror – discomfort – then pleasure, for he draws into him at every step as he walks by the river such steady certainty, such reassurance from all sides, the trees bowing, the grey spires soft in the blue, voices blowing and seeming suspended in the air, the springy air of May, the elastic air with its particles – chestnut bloom, pollen, whatever it is that gives the May air its potency, blurring the trees, gumming the buds, daubing the green. (*JR* 28)

When Jacob experiences the "discomfort" of having to perform expected social roles, he retreats into himself, and into the natural world. In the passage above, Jacob's intentionality is front and centre: he consciously "draws into him at every step" the sensory expressions of spring, and, in doing so, is actively participating in the multiple actions and transformations ("blurring," "gumming," "daubing") that surround him (29). In this highly visual representation of Jacob in the non-human world, he seeks to understand and process through his body the disillusionment he feels in the face of societal obligations. This form of despondency is expressed by Woolf throughout the text as a pervasive cultural ennui. Woolf describes "passengers" in "omnibuses" who "stare into each other's faces" and who feel a sense of "relief at being a little nearer to his journey's end" (53-4); in another instance, the omniscient narrator suggests that a disembodied voice "whispers" to every character "Is this all? Can I never know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices, which fall upon the tea-table, fade upon the passage, making appointments, while life dwindles, to come and dine?" (80). Woolf's text exemplifies the modernist Bildungsroman in the sense that Jacob searches for individuality in the midst of dominant and inhuman institutions. At the same time, her novel satirizes this very impulse to create meaning — for Jacob's sense of self is also ruled by antiquated modes of thought, which serve ultimately to cloak, among other things, the terrifying brutality of war and

his own place within the system that leads to conflict. In this way, Jacob both creates and obscures the particularities of his Being-in-the-world[5] through conscious employment of his senses as they permeate and absorb the peculiarities of his environment. And, as Coates' argument suggests, he continually devises ways to rearrange objects in his world that appear to divert from a pre-established sense of order. The spaces he inhabits are crucial in order to understand Jacob's ever-changing positioning within the novel, and to see him as a pole at the centre of his world, where his responses and perceptions of his environments indicate Jacob's varying attempts to find equilibrium in the face of societal and personal disillusionment.

Woolf repeatedly repositions Jacob as a perceiving physical entity in spaces that are in a perpetual state of expansion and contraction. In this light, similar to Coates' application of Ahmed is Merleau-Ponty's assertion is that "the experience of space is interwoven [. . .] with all the other modes of experience and all the other psychic data" (*PhP* 287). His idea is that "clear space, that impartial space in which all objects are equally important and enjoy the same right to existence, is not only surrounded, but also thoroughly permeated by another spatiality thrown into relief by morbid deviations from the normal" (287). Merleau-Ponty explains that the classical understanding of a body's perception of space – he is referring to Kant[6] – is of a constitution of parts, of a "strict demarcation line" between "external experience and the things given within that experience" (*PhP* 243). In contrast, he argues that the "perceptual field corrects itself and at the conclusion of the experiment I identify it without any concept because I live in it, because I am borne wholly into the new spectacle and, so to speak, transfer my centre of gravity into it" (*PhP* 251). Including a body with all of its senses intact into the theory of perception allows for an understanding of space that is based upon immersion and integration, and which also assumes that one can traverse mentally the same line back and forth, from past to future, from reflection to intention, as though it were a pure and unchanging division. Merleau-Ponty

[5] Here I am thinking of Heidegger's sense of the term because it gets to the crux of what Woolf depicts, and what Merleau-Ponty theorizes in his writings: that "it is the individual's interactions and involvements with his or her environment, as opposed to any quantifiable measurement of space, which defines that individual's relationship to place" (Simone 65).

[6] Merleau-Ponty asserts that Kant's attempt to explain the synthesis of consciousness and sense is based upon the premise that the world is composed of myriad of separate elements that must be unified by a pure intellect: "what we object to in the idea of synthesis in Kant, as in certain Kantian texts in Husserl, is precisely that it presupposes, at least theoretically, a real multiplicity which consciousness has to surmount" (*PhP* 276).

explains there is a pervading spectacle at the centre of our lived experience, a continual presentation of phenomenon which impresses the specific idiosyncrasies of the world upon our senses. These impressions are stored by our bodies and help us to re-orientate ourselves in the face of inconsistencies and ambiguities, which, for Jacob, include the spaces through which he has moved wherein his body is no longer present.

Woolf offers the reader an array of descriptions in the novel that orient her characters by depicting their sensory responses to the world and these embodied experiences reverberate even through the passages in which Jacob is not physically present or the centre of focus. One of the more immersive phenomenological passages in the novel, wherein Woolf describes the college dormitory rooms of Cambridge, illustrates Woolf's technique. Here, Jacob's absence almost intensifies a scene in which thoughts and senses conjoin, juxtapose, and move in all directions so that the objects of focus are always at the centre of a field of actions and their echoes:

> The laughter died out, and only gestures of arms, movements of bodies, could be seen shaping something in the room. Was it an argument? A bet on the boat races? Was it nothing of the sort? What was shaped by the arms and bodies moving in the twilight? [. . .] "Meanwhile behind him the shape they had made, whether by argument or not, the spiritual shape, hard yet ephemeral, as of glass compared with the dark stone of the Chapel, was dashed to splinters, young men rising from chairs and sofa corners, buzzing and barging about the room, one driving another against the bedroom door, which giving way, in they fell. (36)

Woolf's prose projects and reflects upon the probabilities of the space, but no final conclusions are made. Rather, Woolf constructs a fractured gestalt of impressions, an atmosphere of shapes, intentions, gestures, and utterances. By representing the act of perceiving she builds and expands upon a sense of the spaces, and conjoins through this apprehension an array of actions and objects in the Cambridge rooms. The next section of this sprawling passage becomes increasingly more descriptive and sensorial. Objects — "sofa," "chairs," "square table," an open window — are intermingled with actions: "legs issuing;" legs "crumpled in the corner of the sofa;" Jacob sitting; Jacob "astride a chair" and "eating dates;" Jacob "laughing [. . .] pipe held in the air;" Jacob wheel[ing] around" (36-37). In the midst of this rich atmosphere of movement and matter and thought is the implied body of the narrator. Woolf's representation of the narrator's imagined presence in the scene — the narrative point of view and its ability, like a body's, to continually

reorient itself to surrounding phenomena — is layered by its exclusion, where that point of view is aligned with a woman barred from this patriarchal experience. Thus the conjectural tone and markers of the passage — "if" and "possibly" —and genuine questions produce the gaps and fissures that exist without explicit meaning or answers. In this way, the world of the text is presented as a "spectacle" that is "varied" and "clearly articulated" and situated within an atmosphere of descriptors and potential, rather than an objective and authoritative view of the scene (*PhP* 250). The passage reenacts an imagined experience of a body perceiving and moving through halls, corridors, common rooms, and private studies. The sounds, sights, and sensations in the scene are visceral even in their guesswork, as the perceiving body has experienced itself as an "intersensory system" (*PhP* 119) and can project what the eye cannot see or the ear cannot hear:

> The Moonlight Sonata tinkled away; the waltz crashed. Although young men still went in and out, they walked as if keeping engagements. Now and then there was a thud, as if some heavy piece of furniture had fallen, unexpectedly, of its own accord, not in the general stir of life after dinner. One supposed that young men raised their eyes from their books as the furniture fell. Were they reading? Certainly there was a sense of concentration in the air. (34)

From a phenomenological perspective, the "sense of concentration in the air" can only be perceived by a body repositioning itself in an ever-changing environment. The narrating body in this scene is a "ready-made system of equivalents and transpositions from one sense to another" (*PhP* 235). Because of the embodied thoughts and responses of the observing voice, readers — and indeed the narrator itself — are required to reorient their conceptions of the sounds overheard and shadowy movements observed, as they correspond to gestures and images within the spatial dimensions being depicted. It is what Merleau-Ponty argues about *le corps propre*,[7] where one's own body is a network of possibilities (thoughts, actions, reflections, intentions) that is defined

[7] According to Merleau-Ponty, *le corps propre* is the body as it is lived through one's intentional arc of being, and which includes an implicit awareness of one's gestures, positioning, and potential as one exists in the world. There is an inherent paradox in this state of being because it means the body is both a physical subject and a projection of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "I *am* my body" suggests that the "body is always something other than what it is: always sexuality at the same time as freedom, always rooted in nature at the very moment it is transformed by culture; it is never self-enclosed but never transcended" (*PhP* 205).

by its current situation, experienced on multiple registers. The narrator of this scene implies a body orienting itself in a multidimensional and multi-sensory space, be it physically, imaginatively, or creatively.

Jacob as a character is thus presented and positioned in relation to the vividly described world that surrounds and experiences him. Woolf's description of the Cambridge dormitory rooms suggests the sense of viewing multiple spaces at once, as she inundates the reader with sensory details that serve to create an atmosphere, a thick field of presences that knits multiple vantage points into one panoramic view, and that establishes "organic relations between subject and space, to that gearing of the subject onto this world" (*PhP* 251). Merleau-Ponty argues that our "perceptual experience shows that [the facts of our world] are presupposed in our primordial encounter with being, and that being is synonymous with being situated"[8] (252). He insists that the phenomenological construct that the past shapes and that forms our present situation is not the same as causality. Rather, we are spatially oriented by the echoes of our previous experiences, and these reverberations are what form the terrain and atmosphere of the present. Unlike causality, space is apprehended by a continual reorientation, one that includes the current "upheavals of the contents of our visual field" (Landes 161). In other words, our Being-in-the-world is contingent upon, and a necessary component of, a system of paradoxical conditions because the dimensions and coordinates of this system are determined by both the past and present expressions of the physical body and of conscious thought. It is through this lens I argue that, like the inkblot on Mrs. Flanders's page, the scene in the dormitory rooms bleeds into existence. Sounds of a waltz being played on a gramophone intermingle with mysterious "thud[s]" and "so many young men" reading, lounging, legs "sprawled" over the arms of chairs and tabletops. The narrator's understanding and depiction of the scene, and thus a reader's perceptions of the rooms of Cambridge are wholly immersive; there is little sense of the dimensions of the space nor the structures of the walls and ceilings. The narrator's gaze and hearing and conjectures skim the contents of the series of rooms as one might a gallery of

[8] It is important to note that the temporality involved in this statement is influenced by Heidegger's assertions in *Being in Time* that our understanding of space, particularly in terms of its dimensionality, is grounded and determined by past events. However, Merleau-Ponty argues that Heidegger gives an inordinate amount of attention to the temporality of space, and, consequently, one is lead to believe that space is understood via a sophisticated process of cause and effect.

paintings: it is like a peripheral vision or sensory apprehension that takes in the whole while examining an array of details (books, histories, cigarettes, smoke, magazines, the Moonlight Sonata, grey walls) splayed in all directions.

The phenomenological movements in the text of *Jacob's Room* come to replace, in a sense, the linear plot lines of Galsworthy, Bennett, and Wells, and enable a traversal of the spatial and temporal gaps in the narrative. The use of vivid descriptions, particularly visual representations of scenes, and the focus on embodied perception, proved an anchor for interpreting the disparate elements of the novel, like the ones that describe the dormitory rooms of Cambridge. Regardless of their own intersectional identity, the reader can be immersed in, for example, the "intimacy" among the young Cambridge men: the "room was full of it, still, deep, like a pool. Without the need of movement or speech it rose softly and washed over everything, mollifying, kindling, and coating the mind with the lustre of pearl" (37). These passages replicate a sense of Jacob's ever-transforming world through not a perceiving eye only, but a perceiving body, and thus establish an intentionality that echoes through the seemingly empty spaces and corridors of the text, such as the scene in which Jacob walks back alone to his rooms.

> But Jacob moved. He murmured good-night. He went out into the court. He buttoned his jacket across his chest. He went back to his rooms, and being the only man who walked at that moment back to his rooms, his footsteps rang out, his figure loomed large. Back from the Chapel, back from the Hall, back from the Library, came the sound of his footsteps, as if the stone echoed with magisterial authority: 'The young man – the young man – the young man – back to his rooms.' (37)

The elegiac tone in this passage is strengthened by awareness of the spaces in which Jacob has already been situated and which he is about to inhabit. In this way, Jacob's being can only be understood both as a solid and diffused object in space. His orientation is determined by his primordial self, which, paradoxically, is on the horizon of perception and yet is the basis of his every thought and gesture. Bonamy crying out "'Jacob! Jacob!'" (155) in the last passage of the novel is profound, not simply because it echoes Archer's voice calling out his brother's name on the beach, but even more so because of the many instances in the text in which Jacob is situated, in a phenomenological sense, by Woolf's descriptions. Woolf's ability to write the spaces of Jacob's world establishes a thick continuum of settings. I argue that the phenomenological nature of Woolf's descriptions of space, the way she integrates external perceptions with internal

thoughts, and concrete objects with abstract reflection, means that the elements that constitute Jacob are as much infused into the spaces his body inhabits. The diffusivity of self Woolf portrays so successfully enables Jacob to exist in the text, notwithstanding his death, or the dominant ideologies of his classical education that threaten to swallow his identity whole, and which do in the end compel him to fight in a senseless and unfeeling war. As Christine Froula insightfully suggests, Jacob Flanders is "an elusive being no net of words can capture:" he is an exemplar of the modernist psyche on an inconclusive search for meaning in the face of preordained social norms and the appalling geometry of institutions that will sacrifice young men to maintain the status quo of empire (64).

The modernist difficulty posed by Woolf's first experimental novel is that the phenomenological space she depicts is not a "certain world, a certain spectacle" (*PhP* 254). The focus is fragmented and diffuse, and does not become fixed permanently in the kaleidoscope of environments Woolf provides for the reader. Furthermore, Woolf's stylistic strategies in *Jacob's Room* are occasionally ambiguous and conflicting; they require interpretive effort, just as an embodied experience of the text is called upon in order to connect passages of rich descriptions across temporal and spatial gaps in the narrative. However, it is these experiments in describing instances of embodied experiences of perception that demonstrate Woolf's ability to write obscurity, an endeavour that has similar implications as the practice of phenomenology, which, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, is to "stand in wonder before the world and cease to be complicit with it in order to reveal the flow of motivations and carry me into it, in order to awaken my life and to make it entirely explicit" (*PhP* 309). Likewise, Woolf's novel offers the reader the possibility of a world that is incomplete and contradictory, a world that can be believed in without being entirely comprehensible according to the very rules, expectations, and hegemonic norms that lead, Woolf implies, to both Jacob's death and, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the trauma of Septimus Smith.

2.2 "On the Ebb and Flow" of Thought and Sense: The Irreducibility of Consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Throughout her career, Woolf explored interdisciplinary techniques intersecting with the artistic practices of the Bloomsbury Group, and devised methods for representing consciousness as both a sensory and psychic engagement with the world. This phenomenological encroachment between thought and sense establishes a "worldly realism," as Pam Morris phrases it, wherein the idiosyncrasies of individual experiences are displayed in Woolf's work as embodied encounters with a shared material space (21). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf explores what one might call not just a "worldly realism," but a worldly time, which I link to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the "historical present," in which she overlaps the thoughts, memories, and sensory perceptions of multiple characters as they exist within specific temporal and not merely spatial parameters — the actions in the novel taking place over the course of a single day. By calling attention to the lived materiality of clocks, cars, aeroplanes, flowers, windows, and streets, Woolf creates moments of suspended time wherein the characters of Clarissa, Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and Septimus Smith, among others, offer alternate but simultaneous perspectives on the measured and normalizing ideologies of their social order. Woolf's achievement with *Mrs. Dalloway* meshes with the call she makes in "Modern Fiction" (1921), imploring writers to acknowledge the diffusive and interpenetrating nature of the subjects about which they write: "'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of the brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss" (164). This statement encapsulates Woolf's stylistic and philosophical vision as a modernist writer. More specifically, it aligns with how Merleau-Ponty understands the function of an intentional being: the "question is always to know how I can be open to phenomena that transcend me and that, nevertheless, only exist to the extent that I take them up and live them" (*PhP* 381). Sara Ahmed explains that this intentional awareness is a way of becoming "oriented," and it highlights the "significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (2). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf effectively represents this embodied and materialist relationship between consciousness and perception by depicting a coalition of the temporal and spatial elements constituting characters' everyday lives. As

importantly, she draws attention to the normative, habituated thoughts and actions that dominate the citizen's relationships to and within that world.

Essential to the novel's temporal structure is the network of interdependent connections among the characters in Woolf's constructed world. As Merleau-Ponty proposes, our internal lives, which encapsulate all of the idiosyncrasies of individual experience, are formed and given importance by our involvement with the communal. This leads me to consider how Clarissa's temporal diffusivity is expressed through and determined by her participation in a collective of intentional bodies. She, along with all of the characters in the story, extend and contract their beings throughout the story and, in doing so, create a psychic rhythm that simulates a collective consciousness, or what Kay Mathiesen refers to as a "shared awareness" of the phenomenal world (235). This collective consciousness – which is distinct from the larger socially-constructed paradigm, which adheres to and enforces a normative ideology or system of thought in interwar London – is a plurality of perspectives sharing in and actively shaping their world. Woolf represents Clarissa as the fulcrum of this communality who has agency as both a privileged woman and as an individual with awareness of the human connectivity at the base of all of her conversations, thoughts, sensory impressions, and temporal movements. The creative function of Clarissa's role means, however, that the representation of this collective is imperfect and incomplete, and a fully-realized image of Clarissa's intentional world is not presented. The characters are immersed, rather, in a rhythmic dispersal of disparate elements suspended in a shared temporal space, a dynamic that has not just communal but also individual significance. Such an approach is signaled by Woolf's compositional notes in the Berg manuscript, where she writes about her plans for the novel: it is to be "a short book consisting of six or seven chapters each complete separately. Yet there must be some sort of fusion! And all must converge upon the party at the end'" (qtd. in McNichol 15). Woolf was aware that the "fusion" she pursued was one that allows for fissures and openings where incongruous elements of experience coexist. Significantly, she wrote later in her diary that her experience creating *Mrs. Dalloway* was analogous to the process of a painter conceiving and developing a visual design: "I am now galloping over Mrs. Dalloway, re-typing it entirely from the start, a good method, I believe, as thus one works with a wet brush over the whole, and joins parts separately composed and gone dry" (*D2* 323). In this light, where the perception of art involves both a sense of the totality of a scene as well as a necessary focus on only parts of what is apprehended, the simultaneously fused

and fissured depiction of Clarissa's life among lives is "the stuff of fiction" Woolf describes in her essay. Mrs. Dalloway's experience of Being-in-the-world is a dialectic matrix of thought spread over the ever-expanding milieu of her sensory experiences.

As Woolf's characters encounter the oscillations and indeterminacies of their respective worlds, their awareness of their own ontological importance and positioning draws attention to the differences that comprise a temporary unity. Characters such as Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and Septimus Smith come to embody the inherent plurality of existence with its ambiguities and contradictions, and each undergoes to varying degrees disruptions and oscillations of the self. These internal and external fluctuations are especially apparent because of the ways in which they are interconnected with Clarissa's mutability. Clarissa's thoughts and perceptions are governed by her temporal imminence, and it is constituted by the phenomenological involvement of the collective. Peter, Richard, and Septimus help to constitute Clarissa's intentionality because they are each driven by a shared need to belong to a collective, but also because Woolf highlights the particularities of their connections to Clarissa —her enmeshment with Peter's and Richard's emotional lives, which are driven by both personal impulses and societal obligations, and her more indirect association with Septimus whose death is a catalyst for her to recognize she is bounded but not constrained by her own privilege. In this way, Woolf represents Clarissa as a social experimenter who oscillates through different states of being, even as she generates a sense of unity, in the face of rigid class conventions and the teleological clock of mortality (*MD* 110). She becomes the unifying agent of the novel in a temporal and spatial, as well as structural and formal, sense. Her phenomenological condition, as much as it is constrained by the patriarchal demands of her heteronormative and bourgeois surroundings, is one of perpetual reorganization that blurs the demarcations between interiority and exteriority, immanence and transcendence, and the individual and the communal. She is, for all intents and purposes, the unfolding "work of art" existing "behind the cotton wool," a composition that encapsulates immeasurable elements of thought and sense spread across a canvas of human connections in a locatable phenomenal space. ("Sketch" 72).

2.2.1 "The Leaden Circles Dissolve in the Air": Temporality and the Mind

In writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf establishes a model for constructing both a conceivable and indeterminate representation of consciousness. To better understand the philosophical significance of this achievement, I examine in this section how Woolf reveals her characters through vivid descriptions of temporal junctures: significant moments wherein time appears to be suspended and wherein the less obvious connections among characters are explored. I give especial attention to Clarissa's and Peter's relationship; specifically, how their senses of themselves and of each other are mediated and heightened by their temporal imminence and by what Merleau-Ponty calls the historical present. Jessica Wiskus describes the experience of imminence as one of temporal mutability, the "rhythm of the past and present," wherein both one's present actions and "interior image of the past" operate simultaneously (120). Woolf's strategy in *Mrs. Dalloway* is to present the many temporal deviations and vacillations that occur within the consciousness in order to depict character in fiction according to the vision she proposes in "Modern Fiction": as an "unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display"(150). Woolf's approach to character enunciates Merleau-Ponty's assertion that consciousness functions in the world via a convoluted and synergistic involvement with thoughts and perception. On the level of plot, Woolf explores these conditions through a sequential narrative structure: she chooses significant instances in Clarissa's and Peter's experiences of the day and organizes them as overlapping and successive moments. Yet, at the same time, her heightened focus on depicting the rhythms of the mind problematizes a linear conception of time and space. Examining Woolf's dialectic approach to temporality reveals how her work intersects with and, in this way, expands upon theories of consciousness associated with philosophers such as Kant and Bergson, where Woolf depicts with accuracy and sensitivity the idiosyncratic movements of the mind on an ordinary day. Woolf consistently refutes an authoritative, objective account of the material world; she instead layers perceptions, language, and memory to represent the polymorphic and socially-constructed as well as physically-inflected nature of human consciousness, resulting in a work of art that is a materialist reflection on the specificities and ambiguities of this ruptured and contested post-war world.

The opening scenes of the novel are an immediate illustration of how Woolf's prose method establishes phenomenological time in the narrative. In the first few lines, she orients the

reader to the temporal patterns of Clarissa's mind according to the limited point of view narration. Clarissa's thoughts meld ordered plans – "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself [. . .] The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming" – with the acknowledgement that the day has not yet been lived: it is as "fresh as if issued to children on a beach" (3). Then, in the first long paragraph, Woolf navigates through a series of temporal shifts: as the tense of the syntax changes, so does the internal state of the protagonist. In the present moment, Clarissa is exulted by a memory of "plung[ing] at Bourton" into the open air (3). The remembered action of swinging open the French windows, and specifically the "squeak of the hinges," triggers an instance within the memory of herself as an eighteen-year-old woman standing at an open window and "looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them" (3). Her self within the reminiscence is caught in a state of reflection, much in the same way her present self is transfixed by the recollected sight of Bourton. However, she reflects that the air is "stiller" in the memory than it is in the present moment, and she remembers an ominous sensation washing over her, and being interrupted by the voice of Peter Walsh uttering mundane phrases: "'Musing among vegetables?' – was that it? – 'I prefer men to cauliflowers' – was that it?" (3). The thought of Peter triggers a shift back to the present, wherein she considers what might transpire in the future – "He [Peter] would be back from India one of these days" (3) – and ponders the curious nature of memory itself: "it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes; his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, when millions of things had utterly vanished – how strange it was! – a few sayings like this about cabbages" (3). The temporal shifts in this passage are characterized by moments at which the past is transposed upon the present with only slight variations. Memory and reflection are interspersed with current perceptions to such a degree that the passage suspends a clear sense of linearity. Clarissa's awareness of the moment is continually modified by images from the past that contribute new shades of meaning to the unfolding picture in her mind.

The opening passage is integral to the temporal structure of the novel as a whole because it establishes a rhythm for understanding Clarissa's internal thought patterns, which traverse fluidly through the past, present, and future, and are commensurate with the fluctuating instances of her perceptual world. This aspect of intentionality is what Merleau-Ponty calls temporal imminence. Sean Dorrance Kelly explains that, in phenomenological terms, imminence is "the vague sense that something is on the verge of becoming clear. [. . .] It is the experience of

something as the thing on which I'm now gaining a perceptual grip" (233). Clarissa's exploratory experience of time is made palpable in its ambiguity. Her thoughts present an undefined temporal space, in which the future is anticipated according to a process of equivocation between the perceptual details of the immediate present and the psychically-charged memories of the past. Merleau-Ponty offers an analogy to describe this phenomenon:

> If I walk along a shore towards a ship which has run aground, and the funnel or masts merge into the forest bordering on the sand dune, there will be a moment when these details suddenly become part of the ship, and indissolubly fused with it. As I approached I did not perceive resemblances or proximities which finally came together to form a continuous picture of the upper part of the ship. I merely felt that the look of the object was on the point of altering, that something was imminent in this tension, as a storm is imminent in storm clouds. Suddenly the sight before me was recast in a manner satisfying to my vague expectation. (*PhP* 20)

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty is explaining how a perceiver apprehends what is at first incomprehensible: the interspersing of diverging elements, both spatial and imaginative, into an unfolding perceptual shape. The vague cues and impressions that serve to make the change in scenery credible to the perceiver are effective because they are derived from the immediate phenomena of the scene. He stresses that this kind of experience is not a series of instances that culminate in a fully-defined picture. Rather, the perceiver understands the temporal change in the environment incrementally – much like the way Clarissa apprehends her morning on the Strand – in which subsequent casts of new realizations and meanings are overlaid on top of each other.

The experience of imminence is at its core an embodied engagement with the world. At the same time, it is important to stress the foundational role the mind plays in this temporal phenomenon. For this analysis, I turn back to Immanuel Kant, in part because critics have acknowledged the importance of Kant's thought to Woolf's prose,[1] and because it is widely agreed his arguments are foundational to developments in early twentieth-century metaphysics. Kant, although working from the premise of pure cognition,[2] offers insight for how Woolf

[1] See, for example, Ann Banfield's *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and the Epistemology of Modernism* (2000).

[2] According to Kant, pure cognition operates under the assumption that a mind apprehends the meaning of an object – that it "prove[s] its possibility" – *a priori*, or before it is "given to us" in

represents temporal awareness in the minds of her characters. One of the conclusions he offers when outlining his "Transcendental Aesthetic"[3] is that time is subject to, and determined by, the capacity of the human mind to discern its "inner state" (*Critique* 22). In this proposition, Kant is attempting to solve an inherent dilemma involved with the apprehension of temporality. He recognizes that the mind, rather than understanding experience by separating it into neatly packaged units of time, is, in fact, conceiving it as a whole, a process that involves an infusion of perceived and remembered stimuli, and that presupposes a sensibility rooted in unadulterated subjectivity. This mode of conceiving experience, one that gives form and meaning to both time and space, is what he calls "pure intuition" (16). For Kant, pure intuition is the acquisition of experience through the *a priori* knowledge of empirical phenomenon, which denotes that what we perceive from one moment to the next is an abstracted form resulting from our mind "intuiting ourselves and our inner state" (22). As he asserts, "[t]he mind then intuits itself not as it would present itself in immediate spontaneity but according to the manner in which it is affected from within, consequently not as it is, but as it appears to itself"(27). In other words, when a mind organizes the immediate instances in the present, it is apprehending these moments by means of a pre-formulated structure of abstract forms generated by the memory, a process that forms a more complete and knowable vision of temporal experience than one's sensory organs can manage.

Although Woolf's conception of temporality is, as I will continue to argue, very much centred in the realm of the senses and especially of lived space, Kant's formulation of the

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experience (*Critique* 2). I am applying this principle to Woolf's approach to temporality, specifically as it relates to self-awareness. In his investigation of the dual consciousness in Woolf's characters, David Sherman explains that "[f]or Kant, the I is merely, and at its most formal purity, the being in us that thinks – the impersonal structural principle of first-personhood in consciousness. The form of the I, insubstantial and abstracted from empirical content, is the I that matters in *Critique of Pure Reason* because it is the only I that is verifiable in his *a priori*, transcendentally ideal philosophical procedure"(369-70)

[3] As Kant categorizes it in *Critique of Pure Reason*, the "Transcendental Aesthetic" is a system that attempts to outline how the human consciousness perceives and experiences the world, particularly in regards to space and time. His premise is that the body exhibits a range of "sensibilities" in order to perceive an "actual object": these sensibilities include "those which belong to the understanding" as well as "sensation" (17). However, Kant's underlying goal is to prove that all of these principles of perception can be distilled down to "pure intuition, which takes place *a priori* in the mind" (17).

transcendent and unified mind is useful for understanding the temporality of consciousness Woolf achieves in *Mrs. Dalloway*. For instance, when Clarissa steps out onto the Strand, Woolf depicts the characters' exteriority on the same plane as her interior impressions. Through the layered process of perceiving, Clarissa expresses a version of Kant's pure intuition: she is aware of her transcendent and wholly subjective state, which leads her to believe that her existence extends unaccountably beyond her immediate apprehension of appearances:

> [S]omehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (6)

As she moves through the spaces of the city, Clarissa meditates on the implications of her world by observing her connections to the people in her life as well as to her immediate physical surroundings. Kant would argue that this heightened sensibility – Clarissa's capacity to perceive her world – is the result of an *a priori* knowledge of space and time, which consists of abstract forms created by memories of previous experiences. Clarissa's reflections align with Kant's pure intuition, then; but they simultaneously echo Merleau-Ponty's conception of temporal imminence. Her thoughts fuse with the natural, material world, resulting in an oscillating apprehension of being that eludes objective analysis but also implies a sensorial movement through time. When Clarissa compares her life to a mist, a substance ephemeral enough to be "spread ever so far" and solid enough to be "lifted," she enacts a transference of consciousness through the past, present, and future, and establishes a condition of being that is transcendent and subjective, yet grounded in the empirical and ever-fluctuating present.

Woolf examines consciousness, particularly in the case of Peter and Clarissa, by exploring the union between the perceived present and the remembered past, and in this sense, Kant's transcendental aesthetic is a lens that reveals the connecting network of subjectivity that underlies her characters' thoughts and actions. However, although it has an overall cohesion, Woolf's representation of time often breaks apart and mutates into a variety of iterations, as is seen in the opening scene of the novel, which suggests that Woolf's ability to represent the mechanics of temporal imminence can be aligned also with Bergson's theories of duration or *la durée*. Unlike

Kant, Bergson gives credence to the role of the body, here as a necessary receptor for the continual and unorganized influx of experiences encountered in the external world. However, similar to Kant, he believes it is ultimately the organized memories that these bodily experiences become which constitute a meaningful and functioning consciousness. Bergson's overarching premise in *Matter and Memory* (1911) is that matter – which he defines as any sensory phenomenon we encounter in the external world – is understood by the consciousness as an "aggregate of images" lodged in our brains (17). This conclusion, according to Bergson, does not rule out the importance of perception; rather, it reinforces the idea that realism and idealism operate from a guiding principle: "perception has a wholly speculative interest; it is pure knowledge" (17). Perception is, in other words, a storehouse of images derived from the memory functions in the brain. Therefore, what one views as conscious perception may be reduced to a series of actions through which the brain interprets the world according to these images. In applying this idea to temporality, Bergson claims that "[h]owever brief we suppose any perception to be, it always occupies a certain duration, and involves consequently an effort of memory which prolongs one into another a plurality of moments" (25). This understanding of the way the brain orders memory and time is useful, for instance, when interpreting scenes in Woolf's novel that present multiple threads of remembered moments in a succession of interpenetrating units of descriptive prose.

The problem inherent in Bergson's proposition – one which he identifies but ultimately fails to solve – is that if perception is speculative, if it is based on a menagerie of images composited by our memory, then one can never be certain of the validity of any interpretation one makes of the world. This has led many contemporary philosophers to conclude that, although Bergson's forward-looking and multidisciplinary approach to temporality had progressed considerably from the dogmatic intellectualism of Kant, he was unable to find a workable solution to the dualist contradictions inherent in duration. Nonetheless, Bergson's theories laid groundwork and provided new tools for modernist writers and theorists to conceive of and represent temporal transitions as extended moments fused together. The psychologist William James, for example, attempted to reconcile Bergson's theoretical contradictions by formulating his own conception of the movement of time. In *Principles of Psychology* (1890) James expands upon Bergson's *durée* as it is expressed in *Time and Free Will* (1889) by arguing that our experience of temporality is instantaneous. He offers that we move along with the flow of time as

though riding in a sailing ship and perceive successive moments of experience as an extended whole:

> The unit of composition of our perception of time is a duration, with a bow and a stern, as it were – a rearward – and a forward-looking end. [. . .] We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it. (609-10)

James proposes that the present is perceived as an extension of what has recently taken place, as well as what is about to happen, which means the temporal moments that constitute what he calls the present are always enmeshed, and the distinctions between these instances are therefore imperceptible to the conscious mind.

Renderings of such experiences appear throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, as Woolf represents time by means of a narrative voice that describes multiple temporal states, which seem to be happening simultaneously in a moment that expands and troubles conventional clock time. In the following passage, for instance, a sense of instantaneous and suspended time is reinforced by the resounding toll of Big Ben:

> It was precisely twelve o'clock; twelve by Big Ben; whose stroke was wafted over the northern part of London; blent with that of other clocks, mixed in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke and died up there among the seagulls – twelve o'clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street. (103)

Scenes like this imply that the massive timepiece with its great bell orchestrates the moments of the day so that the characters, as well as the reader, are made aware of the passing of the hours. Even more significant is how Woolf has expanded the spatial scope of an isolated moment to emphasize that multiple instances are happening at once: the actions of Clarissa and the Warren Smiths; the sounds of the clock mixing with clouds, smoke, and seagulls. This strategy establishes a synthesis among the many perceptual and psychic events Woolf depicts, and it suggests the impression that time is experienced as an instantaneous event spreading outward in more than one direction.

Bergson's and James's theories intersect, then, with the foundational components involved in Woolf's depiction of suspended time, as her stylistic approach in *Mrs. Dalloway* creates an

overall effect that is, at its base, a form of duration. However, Woolf is unconstrained by the limitations of this temporal structure, or more specifically, by its adherence to a logical and coherent organization of the vague peculiarities of experienced time. Rather than ordering the moments of the novel in an ostensibly objective or purely chronological sequence of external events, she displays a layered collage of perspectives expressed through characters' perceptions and internal thoughts, which suggests that these individual minds share a dispersive temporal space. Scenes featuring Clarissa and Peter, in particular, represent moments saturated with multiple threads of reflection and reverie, as well as their entwined thought processes.

> I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says. Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present. It is half-past eleven, she says, and the sound of St. Margaret's glided into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest – like Clarissa herself, thought Peter Walsh, coming downstairs on the stroke of the hour in white. (54)

The narrative presentation and thus the characters' awareness of the bell striking the hour is in one instant precise and explicit, and in the next vague and indeterminate. Unlike theories of duration, where temporal units follow in direct succession an intellectual organization, Woolf's representation of temporality is an oscillating rhythm of actuality and possibility. The above scene is thus an instance of temporal imminence that echoes the unresolved pasts and presents of Clarissa and Peter: it presents an image perpetually out of focus – "Some grief," "some concern" – yet resonant with the clear notes of material specificity (54). St. Margaret is a necessary phenomenal component of the scene's temporality. As Ahmed explains of experience and re-experienced materiality, "[f]or an object to make this impression is dependent on past histories, which surface as impressions on the skin. At the same time, emotions shape what bodies do in the present, or how they are moved by the objects they approach" (2). In this way, the sound of the clock's bell is laden emotionally and psychically with the equivocal and irregular apprehension of the self as it perpetually re-situates itself within its world.

Woolf's reproductions of consciousness are often incomplete and irresolvable; indeed, Woolf's characters reflect overtly upon the ambiguous and seemingly misaligned nature of their past and present experiences, where a seemingly forward movement from one moment to the next

draws with it the past sedimentation of living, and thus lacks clear resolution. This is the very dynamic that Merleau-Ponty explores. The natural flow of time that carries one's life into the future is layered by one's history and especially one's capacity to see and record the objects and gestures of humanity left as a mark or residue upon the psyche. Much like Bergson's understanding of memory, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the solipsism that is generally designated to consciousness is the result of a longstanding process of sensorial and cultural sedimentation. We perceive our existence through an unfolding mental record of our bodily interactions with the world. However, Merleau-Ponty complicates this assertion by arguing that when a mind witnesses similar interactions by other phenomenal beings, the witnessing triggers the consciousness to relive the interactions but in a slightly altered form. The alterations the mind produces are infused into, or transposed onto what he calls the "historical present," a state in which the consciousness is aware of the current moment while situated within the milieu of both past experiences and future projections (*PhP* 347). The historical present is a system of perceiving and remembering whereby the body reproduces the present with retained instances of the past, a strategy that suggests cohesion and interconnection, and that supports Kant's premise of an *a priori* and absolute cognition. However, unlike Kant's pure intuition, the historical present is aligned more closely with Morris's worldly realism: it is a worldly time that it is dialectically charged; it is both an *a priori* and *a posteriori* condition. Merleau-Ponty's writes about this experience as it relates to perceiving the world: "When I turn towards perception, and pass from direct perception to thinking about that perception, I reenact it, and find at work in my organs of perception a thinking older than myself of which those organs are merely the trace" (*PhP* 351-352). In Woolf's novel, Clarissa has a similar awareness when she is walking on the Strand: "She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone" (*MD* 6). Clarissa's reverie is indicative of her intentionality and of her participation in a historical present: she is at once a constituting element of, and an abstracted mind "looking on," her world (*PhP* 352). Her awareness of this condition establishes an intimacy between herself as an individual and her lived history as a perceiving being. Representing the complex dynamics of this relationship can be neither contrived nor planned out wholly through a linear model of artistic logic. The underlying structure of this

representation must be counterbalanced by the ever-present and ever-fluctuating ambiguity of perception, which is implicit in Woolf's modernist narrative style.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the historical present is often seen when Woolf explores the irresolvable nature of consciousness through Clarissa's and Peter's relationship, which involves a complex mingling of solipsism and connection through her use of third-person limited point of view. For instance, when Clarissa anticipates her future interactions with Peter Walsh while mending a dress for her party, she has an alarming realization that Peter might think "she had grown older" (39). However, she absorbs the anxiety this thought produces through a series of reflections. She contemplates the saturated nature of her existence by projecting a version "of herself" into the future – towards the party at the end of the day and into the remaining months ("June, July, August") of her "fifty-second year" (40) – while simultaneously meditating upon the numerous instances in the past that have been lived very much the same as this particular moment:

> Clarissa (crossing to the dressing table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there – the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. (40)

Clarissa's moment of reflection is what Gaston Bachelard would call a phenomenological daydream. In *Poetics of Space*, he argues that we are, as intentional beings, in a perpetual state of inhabiting: we "come back" psychically to our significant moments living in the world "the way a bird comes back to its nest" (119). Bachelard continues to explain that "[t]his sign of return marks an infinite number of daydreams, for the reason that human returning takes place in the great rhythm of human life, a rhythm that reaches back across the years and, through the dream, combats all absence" (119). Clarissa's reflection on the specificities of "this June morning" is a daydream in Bachelard's sense of the term. By returning to the imminent rhythm of the daydream – the "pressure of all the other mornings" – she inhabits "herself" in an historical present: she sees the "pink face" in the mirror as belonging to one of an infinite number of woman who will host a party at the end of the day (*MD* 40).

As Clarissa's experiences illustrate, and especially as they relate to Peter, the majority of

the perceptual encounters Woolf's characters have in the novel are founded on uncertainty, and often as a result of incomplete information, and are conveyed through limited perspectives — and yet these same instances are presented as being continuous for the perceiving subject. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the temporal "unity of the object[s]" we perceive "is based on the foreshadowing of an imminent order which is about to spring upon us a reply to questions merely latent in the landscape" (*PhP* 20). We carry a form of prescience in our body regarding particular objects in our world, which is made possible through our past experience with these same objects. In this light, the unity we experience in time is deeply personal and idiosyncratic in nature. As Merleau-Ponty explains, "an impression can never by itself be associated with another impression. Nor has it the power to arouse others. It does so only provided that it is already understood in the light of the past experience in which it coexisted with those which we are concerned to arouse" (*PhP* 20). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, this perceptual intimacy is often a pivotal element in creating connections between characters, and often through their shared encounter with the material world. For instance, the pervading sense of psychic expectancy ignited by the tolling of a clock's bell prompts feelings of both clarity and dissonance as Peter ruminates upon the latent emotions attached to Clarissa:

> It is Clarissa herself, he thought, with a deep emotion, and an extraordinarily clear, yet puzzling, recollection of her, as if the bell had come into the room years ago, where they sat at some moment of great intimacy, and had gone from one to the other and had left, like a bee with honey, laden with the moment. But what room? What moment? And why had he been so profoundly happy when the clock was striking? Then, as the sound of St. Margaret's languished, he thought, she has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing room. No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall, as if there rolled to him, vigorous, unending, his future. (54-55)

Like many other instances in the novel, this passage represents a character's shifting position within a temporal space mediated by a succession of thoughts, feelings, and sensory resonances. For Peter, the tolling of St. Margaret's clock bell triggers a vivid feeling of connection with Clarissa. As the bell strikes its hours, Peter's internal thoughts spread outwards and project multiple temporal planes. The initial clarity of the feeling of intimacy transitions into a vague

recollection of a moment shared between Clarissa and Peter in a room where a bell was struck in a similar manner. This reflection leads Peter to question the quality of his happiness: the sound of the clock in the present becomes steeped in a feeling of grief as Peter remembers a serious illness experienced by Clarissa in the past. The final stroke of St. Margaret's incites a future projection of Clarissa collapsing from a heart attack. Disturbing though Peter's reflections may be for him, they help to clarify his ontological positioning, but "only in the form of a vague feeling of uneasiness"; they "organize elements which up to that moment did not belong to the same universe" (*PhP* 20). Because these elements are associated through the particularities of personal experience, they create, even in their inimitability, a locatable object.

Significantly, the succession of moments Peter embodies, although obscurely connected, provides an exposé of details that form into a unifying image, and yet one that persistently transforms over the course of the text. This image is as much a portrait of Peter's unresolved feelings for Clarissa as it is a landscape of the temporal parameters of their relationship; as much a meditation on the universal prognosis of mortality as it is an investigation of the specificities of the self. This is a shifting still-life: dynamic in its constantly evolving and altering state, and yet held for a moment when perceived, when recalled to his memory. Through Woolf's use of repetition and variation, the reader's apprehension of the picture may occur alongside Peter's thoughts: such evocative images are "laden" (*MD* 54) with the explicitness of individual moments that in their imminence "satisfy" the "vague expectations" of what might transpire in the future (*PhP* 20). In this light, Woolf's particular method for representing the fusion of temporal experience and consciousness, as seen especially in Peter's and Clarissa's relationship, presents a host of philosophical ramifications. If, according to Merleau-Ponty, perceiving and representing the world implicates consciousness, such moments offer the perceiver/artist a paradoxical form of transcendence: it is a freedom that is "both the ground of, and the impediment to" conceiving and articulating one's "personal history" (*PhP* 347). Through this lens, Peter's and Clarissa's experiences of their relationship are always unresolved and, therefore, part of an ongoing interpretive process.

For Woolf, then, the act of writing is fundamentally contradictory; to invoke Moreau-Ponty, it involves "reflect[ing] upon the element of opacity in [one's] present," while never really "seiz[ing] the present through which [one] lives with apodeictic certainty" (*PhP* 347). During the process of composing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf describes in her diary how she understands the

process of writing: "Thinking it over, I believe it's getting the rhythm in writing that matters . . . take the skip of my sentence at the right moment – I should reel it off; – there is a good deal in this which I should like to think out; it's not style exactly – the right words – it's a way of levitating the thought out of one" (*D3* 322). Woolf's idea of "levitating" one's thoughts suggests a perceptive process wherein the writer attunes herself to the rhythms in language that corresponds with the irregular rhythms of living in the world. As Teresa Prudente suggests, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf "[refuses] the simplifications of superimposed forms and the untenable belief in a total intelligibility of consciousness" (130). Therefore, her "work mirrors a complex and multi-leveled notion of consciousness. Human mind is in fact conveyed by Woolf not as an organic and unified datum, but rather as a streaked and vertiginous phenomenon which escapes complete representability" (130). Prudente's assessment articulates how Woolf's prose simulates a phenomenological rhythm of consciousness. Unlike Kant's theories for reproducing the past, or James' formulation of duration, Woolf's structures can often feel disordered and diffusive, and yet they still generate the impression that the lives of her characters are connected in time. Throughout her novel, Woolf depicts the temporal, yet ever-transforming, consciousness both Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty describe. To quote Joseph Allen Boone, Woolf's prose is an "unfolding process – 'one thing…open[ing] out of another' [. . .]. On the level of sentence, Woolf creates highly elliptical structures [. . .] that allow an unbroken accretion or amplification of detail within the individual sentence" (179). This writing strategy enables her to position ideas and sensory details in a place of suspension so that they might be viewed from multiple sides and angles. At the same time, she depicts consciousness as a perpetually oscillating presence that manifests her characters' motivations and intentions in myriad mutable forms, thereby implying a field of temporal realities. Woolf's phenomenological approach to time establishes a foundation to explore the wide-ranging relationships among individual characters in her world. This philosophical framework enables her to construct an authentic environment, a shared sensory space, wherein her characters exist as a community of intentional beings. However, it is also a fractured collective that problematizes the societal norms of London's upper-class circles, and that sanctions time and space for characters to reflect upon and question the hegemonic politics of family, sexuality, and gender in post-war London. It is through the experience of the collective, of a collage-like unity, that the constructed order of social norms are made visible and themselves shown to be contingent.

2.2.2 "Rumours were at Once in Circulation": Immanence and the Collective Consciousness

Woolf's constructed domain of social interactions, sensory impressions, and temporal movements in *Mrs Dalloway* represents a paradoxical condition: i.e. that there is ambiguity involved in living a shared existence among other conscious beings. Merleau-Ponty argues that philosophical thought regarding consciousness has generally operated under the premise that "there are two modes of being, and two only: being in itself, which is that of objects arrayed in space, and being for itself, which is that of consciousness" (*PhP* 349). This distinction reinforces a fundamental and longstanding assumption about perceiving the object world, in which there is seemingly no room for either a plurality of perspectives or a multiplicity of consciousnesses. Woolf articulates such a problem in *Mrs. Dalloway* by presenting characters who strive to exist in two worlds: for instance, Clarissa struggles to reconcile her external roles as mother, wife, and socialite (to be one thing for everyone) with her longing for a more multi-faceted internal world of thought and emotion. Merleau-Ponty addresses this apparent paradox by arguing that the fundamental principle or condition that allows sentient beings to exist in a world together is that their consciousnesses interpret the world through both internal and external lines of communication: we are "together in a single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception" (*PhP* 369). This is the fundamental contradiction of intentionality: the social world and the inner world of the individual are dimensions of the same phenomenon, and constitute what Merleau-Ponty calls a "universe of immanence" (*VI* 6). Merleau-Ponty asserts that if a universe of immanence is to be plausible within a shared perceptual space, all of the events that occur, even the deviations and disruptions, must be considered integral elements for constituting what Kay Mathieson calls a "collective subject" or "collective creation" (248). Mathieson argues that this collective creation is generally present under a set of three principles: the individuals involved must be a plurality ("there are multiple conscious subjects); they must be aware ("there is genuine intentionality"); they must be a collectivity (they form a "social group") (236). I would argue that all three of these elements are operating in Woolf's novel: she establishes a concrete temporal world with multiple subjects positioned within clear spatial parameters. In this way, an inbuilt empathy is established among the players who are phenomenally engaged in this world. A collective creation is enabled and determined by the

individual consciousnesses living out a particular day in London, and engaged in a collective intentionality. Woolf achieves this phenomenological ordering of perception by spilling out fragments of thought and sense onto a diffusive temporal field of events and character interactions. As Sarah Latham Phillips explains it:

> [t]hroughout the June day, the characters recollect experiences that are personal to themselves, gradually enabling the reader to piece their fragmented lives together. As the day progresses, ultimately culminating in Septimus's suicide and Clarissa's party, their retrospective thoughts are balanced by anticipation. Time intrudes on their consciousness through the sounding of Big Ben, helping to break up the novel into hours and sections, and their memories and thoughts are brought back to reality and interrupted by a shared public time. (21)

Without using the term, Phillips outlines how a collective intentionality operates through the characters in the novel. She identifies the philosophical contradiction of individual consciousnesses sharing a world. As Merleau-Ponty would assert, the communal mind, much like the anonymous psyche, perceives its reality via a succession of disruptions and deviations from its understanding of the current moment. In the novel we see, as Kimberly Engdahl Coates suggests, an exposition of "new narratives and alternative relations to time and space," ones which suggest a "politics of perception that privileges disorientation and seeing 'slant wise'" (285). In this sense, the collective consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway* is in a perpetual state of reinvention: it is both liberated and tethered by its shared past associations and future intentions, by its externally heteronormative and internally "slanted" affinities and perspectives (282).

Woolf uses the Bond Street scene to introduce how a collective consciousness might operate in a shared physical space and temporal moment. Woolf creates a network of characters that seem to be infused into the internal and external spaces she vividly describes, and she thus echoes her image of the "semi-transparent envelope" that enables access to multiple layers of consciousness at the same time ("Modern" 150). I would argue this space is not depicted as a container for consciousness but instead as a medium in which the multifarious aspects of thought and sense spread outward: it is a worldly realism that reveals its dependence upon specific points in time. For example, the "violent explosion," which marks the presence of the attention-drawing motor car on Bond Street, instigates a phenomenological moment that unsettles boundaries of perception, language, and being (*MD* 14). The people along the street who perceive the car

according to their senses share an interior world of psychic disruption, awe, and anticipation. The vehicle ignites a "circulation" of "rumours" from "the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street [. . .] passing invisibly, inaudibly, like a cloud, swift, veil-like upon hills, falling indeed with something of a cloud's sudden sobriety and stillness upon faces which a second before had been utterly disorderly" (15). The perceptual currents and rumours swirling around a central and increasingly misty object of focus illustrate both an intentional and collective consciousness. The disruption causes individuals to deviate from their present trajectories and to form a bond with other anonymous beings through their shared effort to reassemble their perceptions and establish equilibrium in a moment of ambiguity.

The characters that experience the disruption of the motor car on the Strand exist within a shared field of temporal and spatial relations. This phenomenological condition, I would argue, aligns with Merleau-Ponty's concept of the historical present on a more expansive scale, extending beyond the individual relationship between, for instance, Clarissa and Peter. Donald A. Landes describes how Merleau-Ponty theorizes our temporal positioning as it operates in the world in a collective sense: "Within my experience, my intentional orientation structures the world according to the sedimentation of previous human actions, and this is the basis for communication between individuals, whether it be through language or through gestures, or between present individuals or across time" (165). Significantly, for Merleau-Ponty, such "sedimentation" is possible through our shared involvement with cultural artifacts:

> The cultural world is then ambiguous, but it is already present. I have before me a society to be known. An Objective Spirit dwells in the remains and the scenery. How is this possible? In the cultural object, I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity. Someone uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, the bell for summoning, and it is through the perception of a human act and another person that the perception of a cultural world could be verified. (*PhP* 348)

In light of the cultural prestige and status the motor car in Woolf's novel signifies, it is an unmistakable cultural object; it is a matter that has specific connotations according to its socially-determined or naturalized uses. Each perceiving body directs its gaze in the object's direction: "Everyone looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood" (*MD* 16). The car becomes a phenomenal force that mobilizes and draws together diverse intentional thoughts and actions. Septimus is both

captivated and "terrified" by the "curious pattern like a tree" that he discerns through the glass of the car window; Lucrezia wonders if it is the "Queen going shopping," while others conclude it must be the "Prime Minister" (16). All minds agree that "greatness was seated within" the confines of the dark vehicle (16). In this scene, the content of the collective gaze is a phenomenon unto itself and is distinct from the experience of its individual members, and yet both realities are happening simultaneously. Here, then, the collective consciousness represents a plurality of thought and sense, an intentional body constituted by the inter-subjectivity of its individual parts, and responding as a whole to the unpredictability of living in the world.

The sensory-filled moments evoked by the motor car and shared by individual consciousnesses in a temporal space illustrate what S.P. Rosenbaum calls Woolf's "philosophical realism" (19). Rosenbaum uses Bergson's theory of time to discuss how in *Mrs. Dalloway*, "individual consciousnesses are related to one another through their perceptions of a common environment" (19). However, Rosenbaum observes that, dissimilar to Bergson's analogy of the "flow[ing]" stream of thought, Woolf's representation of consciousness is more like a "sea in which the characters live like fish and experience in their different places the rippling circles of the hours" (19). Rosenbaum's visual analogy illustrates what Merleau-Ponty would call the "pregnancy of possibles" (*VI* 250). As Johnson describes it, Merleau-Ponty's conception of the synthesizing of interior and exterior modes of being may be likened to the "explosion of seed pods, united and separated, it is the dehiscence of the colors of fire, it is the labor of pregnancy, the joy and pain of new life and separation, it is the shock of death and the work of mourning and grieving" (30-31). The scenes with the motor car, and later the aeroplane, present an encompassing vision of an unlimited range of connections woven together and operating underneath the official meanings or intentions of the cultural objects themselves, be it reverence for the the monarchy or attention to a sky-written advertisement. Woolf achieves this heightened sense of realism, this worldly realism, by representing the specificities, and therefore limitations, of individual bodies caught up by and wandering through the parameters of a distinctive yet fundamentally disruptive sensory space.

The phenomenological current of the scene on the Strand is exemplified through its rhythm of collective imminence, which is especially seen in Woolf's description of the lingering impact of the car's passing upon the people on the street: "The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of

Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way – to the window" (*MD* 19). The effects of the cultural artifact are imperceptible and invisible but permeate:

> [S]omething had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional [. . .]. For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound. (19)

The profundity of the scene is driven by a shared mystery, and each individual consciousness contributes concrete information and implies new ambiguities that are instantaneously processed by the collective body. As Mathieson describes it, the "collective is like a fictional entity that is simultaneously imagined by a number of persons" (248). It is, therefore, inevitable that collective creation of this kind is incomplete, fallible, and indeterminate. Woolf also draws attention to the contingency of the cultural authority that would place objects and subjects alike according to constraining normative categories. In this way, the individual agents of the collective are propelled by a shared goal to continually reorient themselves to the inter-subjectivity of experience within the parameters of a potentially knowable temporal and spatial world.

The reinvention of space through a collective engagement with a cultural object enables a communal immanence that both participates in and dissolves the boundaries of perspective and, especially, proportion. This experience of the city as a space of unbridled wonder and colliding extremes, and yet hedged in by ordered streets and knowable landmarks and political symbolism, has been understood by critics as a quintessential modernist condition. Like Michel de Certeau's view of Manhattan as a "texturology," Woolf provides a sense of the city from above in which it becomes a "wave of verticals [. . .] in which extremes coincide – extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space" (91). The result of this perpetual state of upheaval is a city that "invents" itself in the "present [. . .] from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future. A city composed of paroxysmal places in monumental reliefs. The spectator can read in it a universe that is constantly exploding" (91). It is an echo of Woolf's modern London, just as her characters echo Certeau's description of a particular type of urbanite, the "Wandersmänner" ("walkers") that traverse back and forth across the conventional boundaries of the "planned and readable city" in order to create new spheres of intersecting spaces. They mark a "'spatiality'"

that requires the people who exist within it to exhibit a relentless form of experiential intuition in order to survive:

> [I]f it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements. (98)

The characters on the Strand represent this type of urban walkers. They too are involved in a collective creation of the modern city that is built on indeterminacy and flux simultaneous with planning and infrastructure. Thus when the psychic ripples caused by the presence of the motor car eventually subside and Woolf introduces a new cultural artefact, that aeroplane draws the attention of the collective consciousness to the scene above. The response to the phenomenon in the sky determines new patterns of sense and thought, and in doing so, creates another "ensemble" of distortions and "improvisation[s]" (Certeau 98). In Woolf's description,

> All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls. (*MD* 22)

Out of the shared disorientation caused by an ambiguous disruption of the new cultural artifact, a conceivable rhythm of perception emerges via the "flight of gulls" and the striking of the bells. These sensory patterns culminate in a suspended moment of silence, and they become a "structure that binds the past and present, subject and object, ideal and sensible; it holds together the 'inside of the outside and the outside of the inside,' through which a common vision arises as expression" (Wiskus 120). In the "silence and peace" of staring at the sky, the individual members of this collective creation engage in an inter-subjectivity that weaves strands of connection across temporal and spatial boundaries (*MD* 22).

Woolf's representation of communal immanence in such scenes establishes a useful model for understanding and, to a certain degree, reconciling the ambiguities and discrepancies involved when a plurality of bodies and minds interact in a shared phenomenal space. As Landes explains, "[g]iven that all consciousness begins from its own perspective, there must be some truth to the

problem of solipsism, and yet nevertheless there is communication" (166). Of course, such perspectives, and such reactions and responses of the characters to the cultural artifacts, are determined by each citizen's agency within the social order. Clarissa's position of class stability means that in many ways, and as Emma Simone observes, she "comfortably embraces all that the car and its occupants represent," whereas Septimus's response is "one of terror in the face of this symbol of authority and conformity" (88). However, Woolf's strategy of bringing together disparate perspectives and modes of perception suggests the potential to break apart categories based on hegemonic social and political orientations, and instead offers up a suspended present. Worldly realism and worldly time are in play at and before the party, as Woolf draws attention to the contingency of lived experiences that cannot be fully contained by static social narratives. As Carolyn Dinshaw explains, the temporal space of the present "is never purely there at all: it is transition, always divided between no longer and not yet'" (qtd. in Coates 290). In the novel, Woolf depicts distinct intentional consciousnesses that are each connected to one another, more broadly through an awareness of normative societal roles and divides, and more specifically through the temporal and psychological factors surrounding Clarissa's impending party, especially for Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and — through Bradshaw — Septimus Smith. It is my argument, therefore, that both Clarissa and her party are, much like the motor car and the aeroplane, cultural creations in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the "cultural object" (*PhP* 348). Clarissa's gathering is made a reality on both psychical and physical planes as individual characters express their thoughts, actions, impressions, and memories, and as Clarissa's own consciousness permeates outward and into the sensory specificities of the world. Using (and abusing) her privilege, and also her awareness of time and space and experience itself, she is the living and breathing metronome of the novel, a timekeeper who is caught up in a rhythm wherein her ontological autonomy both creates and is created by a fractured whole.

2.2.3 “But it was Clarissa One Remembered”: The Body and the Multi-Layered Self

Mrs. Dalloway’s party is, on a domestic and much more classed level, an echo of the scenes on the Strand: in a common space and in a moment in time, Woolf depicts a collective, interactive, constantly shifting consciousness. The sense of unity in such scenes involves each character contributing distinctive perspectives of the whole and thus collectively establishing a multifaceted gestalt of thought and lived experience. Though suspended chronologically and dependent upon individual perception, it is not static but instead dynamically relational. As Merleau-Ponty asserts, “[i]n reality, the other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because this perspective itself has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the other’s, and because both are brought together in the one single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception” (411). Here Merleau-Ponty describes how the solipsism of consciousness bleeds into the collective, establishing a pattern of temporal imminence and psychological immanence that pulses within a shared phenomenal world. Throughout the central section of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf develops this phenomenological pattern by focusing one at a time on the internal and external rhythms of individual consciousnesses — and particularly those who are connected to Clarissa Dalloway in varying degrees of social, emotional, and physical proximity — as they move through and interact with the materiality of the city. Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and Septimus Smith are Wandersmänner who offer a range of potentialities both in their autonomy and through their involvement in the otherness of the objects and people of their world. The three are ultimately linked through Clarissa herself, and while Peter and Richard are focused on both Mrs. Dalloway and the party, it is the role of Septimus in the text — and indeed, in the text-world — that draws forth the layered significance of Woolf’s worldly realism. Moving beyond subject-object hierarchies, Woolf’s representation of differently embodied experiences in this interwar London illuminates the interplay among the sensual and the mental, the emotional and the rationale, the individual and the planned, and the collective and the personal. Peter, for instance, subscribes to a Cartesian model of being – “Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind, he thinks; a desire for solace, for relief” (*MD* 62) – and yet engages in his rumination during moments when his body is entirely immersed in sensory encounters, a process which cycles back repeatedly to thoughts of Clarissa and her party. Richard, too, is confined by dualistic conceptions of being — he casts clear demarcations between his

public and private roles, and between what is felt and what is spoken — and yet as he moves through the city following a lunch with Lady Bruton, he unintentionally becomes a Wandersmänner fully immersed in the world. While hearing the repeated tolls of Big Ben, he attempts to reconcile his emotional connection to Clarissa with his fidelity to his prescribed function as family patriarch, and remains wandering between the two. Septimus stands out from the other men due to his psychological trauma, a vividly realized state through which Woolf draws attention to the sensory particularities of London while positioning psychic fragmentation as a legitimate state of embodiment. Septimus's psychological break from hegemonic reason and his resulting suicide disrupt, but also resonate with, Clarissa's consciousness in its temporal imminence. Despite their various degrees of spatial separation and philosophical differences, what links Peter, Richard, and Septimus to Clarissa is that all are motivated by a longing for embeddedness, to belong to a unique temporal space shared by others. As Ahmed explains it, "bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling" (9). Bodily reality has diverse ramifications for Woolf's characters depending in large part upon their various degrees of social agency and access to community — a reality that is especially tragic for Septimus, who has no "dwelling" in which to express his experiences of disorientation as a traumatized soldier and queer male. The particularities of the characters, the embodied experiences of specific individuals against the backdrop of heteronormative and imperialistic society, are the grounds of the critique. However, it is the underlying intentionality of those characters that constitute the cultural object that is Clarissa's party and that suggests — regardless of her class and sense of division from others, such as Doris Kidman and Ellie Henderson — the impulse toward collectivity that is materialized in her gesture.

The interrelation between characters' sensory and mental perceptions creates a patterning of different and interrelated experiences, but it also presents an imperfect system of interconnectedness. As Taylor Carman asserts, the world "affords, invites, and facilitates, just as it obtrudes, resists, thwarts, eludes, and coerces" (86). In the same way, Woolf's representation of London is a partially intelligible habitation wherein the self is confronted with both freedoms and boundaries. By drawing attention to the movements of individual Wandersmänner, Woolf reveals how they are each part of a system of intercommunication that is never fully resolved. This network is coordinated by a collective mode of subjectivity, in which each intentional body within the group articulates the latent qualities of the world in which it exists. Merleau-Ponty

argues that this communal form of intentionality is performed by the implications of the body: it is the nexus out of which all other possible relations are established. This idea implies that one embodies the world as an "incomplete individual," or from a place of deprivation, so that one's Being-in-the-world is a perpetual rhythm of realization and potentiality (*PhP* 408). Carman argues that this inexorability of living in the world means that orientation with our surroundings is not contingent on a special set of principles or circumstances, but is a given and necessary condition of our reality, "indeed as definitive as us" (87). In other words, our ontological importance, as much as it is bound up in determining the intrinsic particularities of the self, involves the "skilful mastery of complex causal interconnections between heterogeneous bodily movements and sensory experiences" (87). Who we are is governed by what we do, and what we do is entwined with who we are.

For Woolf's characters, this chiastic rhythm of the consciousness existing in the world is represented as a synchronicity between dialectical extremes that speak to the tension between the individual and the collective. As Peter walks the streets of the city, for example, he frequently oscillates between his commitment to status and to individualism, to self-love but also to connection with others, and to introspection as well as receptiveness to the world. In one sense, Peter's actions indicate an individualistic paradigm: Woolf frames him as an outsider, the "solitary traveller" (*MD* 63). He is driven by a sense of self-importance, and yet he is acutely conscious of his inability to conform to and succeed in the patriarchal order within which he dwells and almost unconsciously identifies. For instance, Peter fixates on the idea of becoming inconsequential in a class system that idealizes young men while simultaneously attempting to "keep step" with the rhythmic march of boy soldiers on the street (55). Peter's mirroring of the movements of the young soldiers is a gesture that signals his habituation to normative actions, and it speaks to his complicity with the standardized values of the British Empire. Nonetheless, this alignment is complicated by his more critical reflections, as Woolf interweaves descriptions of Peter's thoughts with his bodily movements through his own perspective as the narrative point of view. He is thereby positioned in a world that involves sensory input from all sides, data that correlates and equivocates with both his conscious and unconscious actions. As Carman describes it, "[t]hings present themselves to me with positive and negative valence of all kinds, primordially and inextricably fused with my own bodily needs and capacities" (86-87). Woolf's use of third-person limited narration and shifting centres of consciousness continually reinforces

this phenomenological reality: she constructs a world that challenges her characters to respond to the contradiction of exercising conscious thought while living in a body that is also habituated, as in Peter's case, to the expectations of class, gender, age, and nationality.

Peter's physical movements through the streets demonstrate his autonomy as an individual consciously contributing to an unfolding cultural creation, which is especially revealed through his expressed emotional and psychological ties to Clarissa. As he interacts with his surroundings, Peter is distracted by encroaching feelings of longing and regret: he ponders whether he should or should not go to Clarissa's party, whether he should have left Clarissa after their first major fight at Bourton, and whether he should have travelled and married abroad. Even while he surreptitiously stalks an anonymous young woman, he is unable to refrain from comparing her to Clarissa: "There was a dignity about her. She was not worldly, like Clarissa; not rich, like Clarissa" (*MD* 58). Through all of this, Woolf draws attention to the interrelations between Peter's thoughts and sensory encounters, which cause momentary redirections in his mind. For instance, he internalizes Clarissa's refrain to come to her party while he encounters the sights and sounds of London: "Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour" (52). This passage, versions of which are reiterated throughout the novel, indicates Peter's conscious engagement with a rhythm more expansive than himself; it emphasizes his involvement in a collective creation, which is situated in a particular milieu that resounds his own layered thoughts and actions. These instances confirm his phenomenological connection to Clarissa, who is, like Big Ben, a cultural object that resonates in the mind multi-directionally.

As Peter's perceptions of Clarissa signify, the collective consciousness relies on each member of the collective to embody a form of ontological freedom, yet one that is synchronized with the condition of being wholly involved in a shared phenomenal world. Peter's descriptions of Clarissa are, at points, diffusive and biased and subject to the changing conditions of his perceived surroundings, all of which are necessary attributes of existing as an intentional being. He is equally impacted by the totalizing and homogenizing paradigms of the ruling class, as he by his ambiguous and irresolvable emotional attachment to Clarissa. Furthermore, his body adapts to and reinterprets the particularities of London as it absorbs the imminence of Clarissa's party, which situates him in a vacillating and liminal — rather than "factual" — state of

perceiving the world (*PhP* 419). Peter's consciousness, even in its constraints, composes an image of Clarissa that is situated in the specificities of present London, rather than as a purely abstract construct confined to the past:

> But if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists, he thinks, and advancing down the path with his eyes upon sky and branches he rapidly endows them with womanhood; sees with amazement how grave they become; how majestically, as the breeze stirs them, they dispense with a dark flutter of the leaves charity, comprehension, absolution, and then, flinging themselves suddenly aloft, confound the piety of the aspect with a wild carouse. (62)

This passage presents an instance of embodiment, in which Peter's body absorbs both the particularities and obscurities of his surroundings. He provides a description of Clarissa that is produced out of perceptual spontaneity and immediacy. Through Peter's eyes, Clarissa becomes, in a sense, an idealized type; but it is an ideal that is subject to transformation because it is constructed through the peculiarities of his experience with her as another phenomenal being, and it is modified by his perceptual engagement with the world.

By giving focused attention to individual wanderers, Woolf explores the "absurdity" that underlies a plurality of individual consciousnesses living in and interpreting the world of London (*PhP* 418). Merleau-Ponty responds to the seeming contradiction of this reality by stating that "[s]olitude and communication cannot be the two horns of the dilemma, but two 'moments' of one phenomenon" (418). Peter's personality – his impulsivity, sensitivity, and indecisiveness – is particularly illustrative of this seemingly oppositional condition of being; however, even a comparatively measured and self-contained character such as Richard Dalloway has a significant stake in this phenomenological pattern. Richard's solipsism, similar to Peter's, is entwined with his connection to Clarissa. He merges internal and external modes of communication by living out the particularities of his separateness while engaging bodily in the shared locality of the Strand during his expedition through the shops: his mission to buy Clarissa a symbol of his love. Richard's ironclad certainty of his social importance – "being pertinacious and dogged, having championed the down-trodden and followed his instincts in the House of Commons" (126) – is layered by his suppressed emotional attachment to Clarissa, his anxiety regarding her past with Peter, and his sense of being incapable of fully connecting with his wife. These layered perceptions of self disrupt his plans and disturb his staunch propriety, but thereby leave him

susceptible to the transformative aspects of his own intentionality.

During Richard's relatively brief performance as a Wandersmänn, he becomes increasingly aware of his temporal imminence. Initially, the resounding peals of Big Ben represent, for Richard, stability and reason: they affirm his rather utilitarian resolution that "[l]unch parties waste the entire afternoon" (*MD* 128). Yet, in the intervals between the tolls of the clock, he experiences deviations in his movements and thoughts. In stops and starts during his journey to acquire flowers for Clarissa, Richard loses and regains his focus: "And as a single spider's thread after wavering here and there attaches itself to the point of a leaf, so Richard's mind, recovering from its lethargy, set now on his wife, Clarissa, whom Peter Walsh had loved so passionately; and Richard had had a sudden vision of her there at luncheon; of himself and Clarissa; of their life together" (125). This experience of imminence, although brief, is significant for Richard. He is compelled to feel ambiguity about a person with whom he shares the intimacy and consistency of a marital contract. In fact, he is unable to see their life together as "distinctly" as he would like to: "And Clarissa – it was difficult to think of her; except in starts" (126). This acknowledgement instigates a succession of unsettling thoughts. As he considers buying a ring, he loses confidence in his own "taste" (125). He acknowledges that a gift he has given to her previously, a bracelet, "had not been a success. She never wore it. It pained him to remember that she never wore it" (128). The feeling of uncertainty invoked by this concession reinforces his resolution: "But he would tell Clarissa that he loved her, in so many words" (128). His internal directive becomes a self-affirming mantra. However, when Richard opens the door to her drawing room, he is neither certain nor resolved about his intentions and feelings. His hesitancy is signaled in the way the movement of the door handle is described – "something fumbling, something scratching at the door" (129) – and the way in which Big Ben's "melancholy" note resonates through the room (129), no longer "musical," and "irrevocable" (128). The wavering certainty of the clock echoes Richard's vacillation between his resolution of reaching his goal and his inability to express "in so many words" his love for Clarissa (129).

In such scenes, Woolf presents the varying degrees of association her characters have with one another as interwoven configurations of perception. Even comparatively predictable characters such as Richard are constructed not as self-contained compartments of consciousness but rather as permeable beings poured into, and therefore subjects of, the disordered swirl of the perceptual world. Unlike Peter's perambulatory route through the city, initially Richard's

movements constitute a focused mission to establish safe and knowable parameters around his feelings for Clarissa, to prove that it is indeed a "miracle [. . .] he should have married [her]" (127). Both the external and internal factors of his consciousness – the tolling of Big Ben and his thoughts of Clarissa – propel him forward and situate him in a specific time and space. However, on his journey, he experiences variations and divergences to his trajectory and achieves neither a clear resolution nor the end goal he intends. Even though Clarissa "understood without him speaking," Richard feels unaccountably thwarted in his original intention to utter an explicit phrase. In this way, and much to his chagrin, Richard is an individual subject in a larger "pattern of behaviour"(*PhP* 351), whose internal feelings are out of step with his desire for stability and linearity.

This lived cycle of dissolution and investiture of consciousness is tragically evident in the veteran, Septimus Smith. Septimus exists simultaneously on the outside and at the centre of Woolf's constructed world. Unlike Peter's privileged status at the edges of the Empire, Septimus is a societal outcast, only perhaps more authentically so than Peter, who straddles the boundaries between life and death, and real and imaginary worlds. He is yet another form of Wandersmänner whose observations and reflections bring the potentially unseen and ignored places of London to the reader's awareness. Septimus is also a body that carries the disorientation of violence and loss. As Ahmed describes it, "disorientation can be a bodily feeling of losing one's place, and an effect of the loss of a place; it can be a violent feeling, and the feeling that is affected by violence, or shaped by violence directed toward the body" (160). Unfortunately, for Septimus, the trauma of war has altered his perception of time and space and place, and unravelled his ontological purpose. He has little foundation on which to create equilibrium when the horror of the unknown comes to the surface. Consequently, he is unable to legitimize his own existence. His mental dissolution happens steadily and inexorably as he embraces his social isolation to greater degrees. Prodded by Lucrezia's coaxing, and by the normative pressures of Dr. Holmes and then Dr. Bradshaw, he struggles to adjust his altered state, but as Coates observes, it "fails miserably" (284). At every step, Septimus's despairing attempts to cling to the sense of order and structure which has been imposed upon him – "for one must be scientific above all things" (*MD* 74) — makes him increasingly disoriented. As a queer male who has closeted not only his sexual orientation, but also his trauma from the war, he has little hope of a community to reorient himself. In Ahmed's words, "heterosexuality as a compulsory orientation reproduces more than

'itself': it is a mechanism for the reproduction of culture" (161). Because Septimus is "out of place" (Ahmed 160) socially, psychologically, and bodily, he is in a perpetual state of exile and his existential path is a process of disintegration. However, this process of disorientation involves an immersion in materiality as seen in Septimus's experiences in the streets of London, which for him are marked by increasingly frequent instances of synaesthesia and moments of temporal and spatial deviations from socially-established, or consensus understandings of the world. Woolf represents Septimus's distinct consciousness by depicting challenges to the boundary between the real and the imagined; however, the distinction between madness and sanity is frequently blurred. For instance, in the following passage the intentional movements of Septimus's mind are traced in a sequence of impressions that fluctuate between the past and present, thought and sound, and imaginative perception and reflection:

> Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping (that's an old man playing a pennywhistle by the public house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still, came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus. Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him – the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself. The music stopped. He has his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house. (74-75)

The synaesthesia in this passage is indicative of Septimus's brokenness, and yet, it is striking how Septimus's experience echoes Clarissa's intentionality as it is described in the first scene of the novel. Clarissa looking through the window onto London streets, while simultaneously peering into the past, correlates with Septimus conflating the sensory phenomena on the street (the motor horn, the "old man playing a penny whistle") with memories of a shepherd boy piping and the imagined images and sounds of the war. Both characters are attempting to reconcile the past and the present, memory and immediate sensation, and future projections and present reactions into a perceptual and imaginative shape. The difference is that Septimus cannot bring

himself into relation with hegemonic norms of thought and behaviour; he is displaced, unable to reconcile the material world with the imposed constructions of his post-war society.

Septimus and Clarissa represent an essential chiastic rhythm in the novel: they enact a transcendent subjectivity on a spectrum of complementary extremes.[4] The bodily and psychological states that the characters in the novel demonsrate thus establish a structure whereby their distinctive perspectives of the world blend one into another. Despite living in disparate worlds, figures such as Clarissa and Septimus feel a pervading foresight that alternate views of their conditions of being exist just on the edge of perception. If allowed, these diverging perspectives have the possibility to cause either disruption or transformation to their respective versions of the status quo. In Septimus's case, the destructive potential of his disorientation is devastating as he transitions from finding asylum in the world of sights and sounds to contemplating the possible scenarios of his own death, and feeling a freedom in complete isolation: "Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know" (*MD* 101). He begins to embrace what Mark Hussey describes as a state of detachment from the social demands of a body experiencing the phenomenal world: "Septimus's world initially depends, as each person's does, on how he lives his body. His unembodiment frees him from the constraints of a normal physical body in his own perception" (13). This realization severs his psychic connection to the world, and legitimizes in his mind his final decision to jump out of a window to his death. Clarissa, on the other hand, is enveloped and insulated by the order and consistency of her upper-class bourgeois existence. The irregularity of war and death is near enough to cause tremors but not so close so as to create a complete disruption to her world. Therefore, when she is confronted by the awareness of Septimus's death "in the middle of [her] party" she is able to respond to its disturbing implications (*MD* 201). She absorbs the shock of learning about Septimus's suicide by reliving an imagined version of it through her own body:

> Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the

[4] Woolf was aware of this dynamic between the two characters quite early on in the process of writing the manuscript: "*Mrs. Dalloway* has branched into a book; and I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side – something like that" (*D2* 207).

ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. (163)

Through this internal performance, Clarissa crosses an empathetic threshold, and in doing so, she fuses Septimus's violent act with her own internal rumination upon mortality. It is thus Clarissa's willingness to embrace the incongruity of death that enables her to become "porous," to borrow from Boone (174). She allows the knowledge of a shocking external event and her own internal responses to this reality to transform her so that she is able to connect and reflect: "Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them" (*MD* 163). Septimus's suicide exposes her indirectly to the otherness of her own subjectivity, allowing her to acknowledge that it is possible for opposites to coexist: to contemplate the nature of death and make a choice to persist.

Clarissa's willingness to process the ramifications of death even as she stands at her party "in her evening dress" is a testament to the embodied and intentional nature of her engagement with living in the world (*MD* 164). All of the characters in the novel help to constitute the party as a cultural artifact in distinctive ways. They contribute pieces of the whole vision of the day and provide versions of Clarissa that cohere into a tapestry of collective being. Indeed, this was Woolf's aim well before the novel was published. On September 7th, 1924, Woolf writes in her diary: "In my last lap of *Mrs. Dalloway*. [. . .]It is to be a most complicated spirited solid piece, knitting together everything and ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to sum up Clarissa" (*D2* 312). As is demonstrated throughout the novel, it is Clarissa herself who consistently exemplifies the fusion of disparate parts. She is persistently involved in a dialectic rhythm of being, in which she absorbs the extremes and discrepancies of living an upper-class life, and who in one moment is confident in her roles as wife, mother, and socialite, and in the next wavers and vacillates in periods of reflective observation. Her activity of organizing a party is comparable to that of an artist creating a painting on canvas. During periods of the process, she is blind to the whole composition, and at others, she steps back from her canvas to see her subjects in relation to their surroundings: "Many a time had she gone, at Bourton when they were all talking, to look at the sky; or seen it between people's shoulders at dinner; seen it in London when she could not sleep" (*MD* 203). For this reason, her party is an unfolding realization and incorporation of these seemingly binary modes of being. When the party finally materializes she reflects:

> Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background; it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow. (187)

Clarissa is noticing on one level how the experience of hosting and participating in a social gathering enables people to perform a role and to behave in ways they would not feel the freedom to express otherwise. On another level, Clarissa is recognizing the inherent absurdity of existing as an individual within a community. In this moment, the collective entity reminds her that she does not exist on her own: she is herself a constituting consciousness, as well as the cultural object the collective needs to remain phenomenologically engaged in creating the party.

In the few hours Clarissa traverses the spaces of London, she ruminates upon the implications of her own existential positioning, as though she is unconsciously preparing herself to face it in a more instinctual manner at her party. Her ability to synthesize contradicting realities is evidence of her imminence, her "exquisite suspense": to feel an "awful fear" in one moment and then to say "[t]here is an embrace in death" in the next (*MD* 33, 203). At the beginning of the novel, as she "walks towards Bond Street," she muses: "Did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?" (6). Her fatalism in this passage, when compared with the train of reflections she makes at the end of the novel, displays a merging of extremes. As she watches the older woman in the house across the street go through the movements and rituals of preparing for bed, the opaque layers of Clarissa's life are suspended for a moment. She perceives the sky and reflects upon her need for connection and her desire to see another through her intentionality. She is fascinated by the seeming incongruities of two realities co-existing side-by-side – the "old lady [. . .] going to bed alone" while people laugh and shout – and by the "young man" who "had killed himself," for whom she feels a profound kinship and at the same time "did not pity" (204). In this suspended moment, she straddles multiple planes of intention: she wishes to exist separate from and, at the same time, unaffected by the tumult of existing – "closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone" (202) – and yet desires to be wholly immersed in the eternal "pleasure" of the sensory world: "Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long [. . .] this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with

a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank" (203). Clarissa exemplifies what it means to absorb and project the phenomena of her subjectivity through a social engagement with the world. For her, this means an immersive and oppositional network of interactions that unfold equivocally in the spaces of London and in her mind.

In her journal, Woolf describes how the character of Clarissa is composed of small portions extracted from her mind: "For my own part I am laboriously dredging my mind for Mrs. Dalloway & bringing up light buckets" (*D2* 189).[5] It would seem that the very experience of writing *Mrs. Dalloway* allowed Woolf to identify how ideas are never quite commensurate with lived experience, and that creating a "tolerable shape" for them is an ever-present pursuit as a writer or painter, one that is as much body-based as it is intellectual (*D2* 325). Both the specificities of Woolf's descriptions and the momentum of her prose resist a purely rational and objective assembling. Woolf constructs her characters from myriad elements and spreads them out to every corner of the narrative. Clarissa, in particular, is situated phenomenologically because her experience of time and space is an unfolding habitation: she continually reorients herself, both psychically and physically, to the specificities of her world. Because of her willingness to be mutable, to be fractured by the implications of her own existential dread – "there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear" (*MD* 164) – she is able to permeate through what Septimus finds to be an impassable barrier: the reconciliation of ones own will with the will of the world. Clarissa chooses in every moment to pass through her initial hesitations – "such as one might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him" – and, therefore, manages to "gently split [the] surface" of thought and sense (25). She avoids becoming subsumed by the conventions of her

[5] Although it is not the focus of this study, it is significant to note that the process of writing the manuscript for *The Hours* was gruelling. Woolf's difficulties were in part due to the fact that through much of 1922 and 1923 her time was spent either battling with or convalescing from physical and mental illness. These challenges both undermined and intensified her resolve to follow through with her stylistic vision. As her diary entries during this period reveal, she was frequently plagued by the seriousness of her enterprise: "I've been battling for ever so long with *The Hours*, which is proving one of my most tantalizing and refractory of books. Parts are so bad, parts are so good. I'm much interested; can't stop making it up yet – yet. What is the matter with it?" (*D3* 262).

upper-class social domain and by the fears and anxieties that haunt her interior world because her life is an immersive and concentrated involvement with the wide sweep of moments and gestures of Being-in-the-world. This pattern of imminence enables her to saturate and be saturated by the places, people, and events that surround her. When she "assembles," it is only for a short time: the "leaden circles [dissolve] in the air," and Clarissa sends pieces and fragments of herself outwards and in all directions (4).

2.3 Touching the Visible Spectacle: The Body and the Reversibility of Being in *The Years*

Woolf's vision for *The Years*, as she writes in a letter to Stephen Spender, was to "give a picture of society as a whole" without presenting an explicit authorial stance, to "give characters from every side," and to reveal "there is no break, but a continuous development, possibly a recurrence of some pattern" (*L6* 116).[1] Unfortunately, the novel has often been evaluated by how it diverges from her innovative style, which many have claimed reaches its height in *The Waves*, or by its supposed "failure to be wholly realist or wholly modernist" (Morris 196). Mark Hussey observes that "for many critics, *The Years* seemed to be a disappointing return to the kind of novel Woolf had left behind with her experimental fiction of the 1920s" (391). Thomas S. Davis writes that, for some readers, compared to her other novels, *The Years* "falls shy of achieving what Woolf called the merger of 'the granite and the rainbow,' the concrete and the poetic" (1-2). Hussey quotes Victoria Middleton, who summarizes the underlying critique of this "'anti-visionary,'" novel: that "'whatever Woolf is saying in The Years, she could have said it better'" (qtd. in Hussey 391).[2] More recently, however, scholars have begun to recognize the scope of Woolf's artistic achievement in her final novel. Of particular note is Pam Morris's assessment that Woolf "practices a form of worldly realism," which circumvents literary categories and restrictive interpretative parameters (196). She suggests that in *The Years*, Woolf "emphasizes self, not as individual mind, but as embodied being and part of a material continuum with social

[1] At the end of her letter to Spender, she declares: "Of course, I completely failed" (*L6* 116). Her denouncement is not surprising given that Woolf was often disparaging about her works, especially when she was employed with them for long periods of time. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the project was deeply personal to her, which is why Stevens Amidon suggests that her final experiment portrays "Woolf's ontology, her state of being, as an artist" (85).

[2] Perhaps the most substantial scholarship on *The Years* to date rests on a foundation academics such as Grace Radin, Margaret Comstock, and Victoria S. Middleton built in the 1970s. These scholars were critical of the 1937 publication of the novel, wherein Woolf chose to follow her artistic trajectory as a novelist and avoid direct social and political commentary. Because of this, they helped to renew interest in the early stages of Woolf's project, an essay/novel originally titled "Here and Now" that built upon themes from *A Room of One's Own*, and addressed especially the disparity between men and women in the realm of professionalization. Woolf decided to excise the essay components of the text, which had been developed from "The Pargiters," an essay based upon a speech "Professions for Women" given to the London/National Society for Women's Service (Hussey 387-390).

structures and processes, with the whole physical universe, and with the potent world of things" (196). Building upon Morris' assessment, I contest that in *The Years*, Woolf is remarkably coherent in her interrogation of the philosophical dilemma of being I have been addressing in my study: that the subjective self and the human body are phenomena entangled in an ongoing process of perceiving the world. Again, the novel reflects Woolf's own embeddedness in and responsiveness to the visual arts, as her descriptions of the environments of the Pargiter family are prevalently ekphrastic in nature: they suspend time "through the engaged contemplation of a particular scene" (Wall 316). Ruth Hoberman states that "*The Years* has a Sickert-like atmosphere, with its detailed descriptions of interior spaces, its depiction of characters in terms of their possessions and décor, its vivid evocation of poverty" (87). Because of Woolf's heightened attention on the exteriority and materiality of her fictional world, her characters operate as receptacles that embody and project meaning through an active inspection of their surroundings. Through the act of looking, the female members of the Pargiter family in particular are able to give meaning to the incomprehensible elements of their existence; phenomena such as death, grief, intimacy, and self-knowledge are actualized via a multidimensional pattern of perceiving. By recording this process of seeing and being seen — of engaging reciprocally with the material world — Woolf provides an astonishingly vivid portrait of the lives of women living in a specific time and place while complicating the hegemonic and patriarchal structures of historical narrative.

Woolf's phenomenological writing in *The Years* contextualizes what I would call her aesthetic approach to feminism. The novel transcends the compartmentalization of gender paradigms and imparts the internal operations of a more microcosmic condition of existing in the world, which is consistently displayed through Woolf's lucid descriptions of natural environments and intimate portrayals of everyday life. In this, Woolf plays variations upon the strategies employed in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*: her descriptions integrate significant moments across temporal and spatial intervals, and her characters are realized through careful renderings of their internal thoughts as they interact with their external worlds. In her first unconventional novel, she requires the reader to search for remnants of Jacob's character left in the wake of his absence. In *The Years*, she positions the reader in the living and waking moments of the characters' lives. Further, Woolf engages with third-person limited point of view, so prominent in the stream of consciousness approach of *Mrs. Dalloway*, by presenting clearly

rendered and focalized vignettes that encapsulate the particularities of a family's experiential present over the course of fifty years. In doing so, she exemplifies, perhaps more than in any of her other novels, an underlying intentionality characteristic of the gaze of her female characters, here within a particular segment of society and in response to historical events and conditions across a substantial span of time. What is perhaps most impressive about her project is that its all-encompassing narrative scope continues to be executed on the level of individual characters. Thus, similar to Clarissa Dalloway, the character of Eleanor Pargiter is governed by an inner-directed mode of perceiving her world. I argue, however, that Eleanor's subjectivity is perhaps more accessible and no less multi-faceted than Clarissa's because her movements and transformations traverse a range of social and spatial demarcations. Stevens Amidon suggests a biographical basis for this unfolding: "Eleanor Pargiter's movement from the hegemonic spaces of Abercorn Terrace to the freedom of her spinsterhood parallels Virginia Stephen's own passage from St. Ives to Bloomsbury" (97). My focus is on Woolf's commitment to describing the synthesis of Eleanor's thoughts and bodily impressions through three generations of family trauma and societal upheaval. What emerges is a narrative that incorporates the unseen moments of being overlooked by conventional forms of documenting the past, and especially the lived experience and object worlds of women.

The coalescence of philosophical and aesthetic modes of recording lived experience, which is central to Woolf's vision for *The Years*, falls in line with the phenomenological trajectory I have been following throughout this project: that the invisible world of consciousness is, as Merleau-Ponty argues, "in my body as a diagram of the life of the actual, with all its pulp and carnal obverse exposed to view for the first time" ("Eye" 126). The reciprocity inherent in this metaphor of the body as a blueprint highlights the principle of reversibility, a concept Merleau-Ponty develops most extensively near the end of his career in his essay "Eye and Mind" (1964) and in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1969). The theory of reversibility proposes that the body is simultaneously an investigative force, as well as a site, for exploring the world. This superimposing of physical objects and states of being establishes an existential space that allows for an authentic experience of living in the everyday, a "thickness of flesh," as Merleau-Ponty calls it, "between the seer and the thing" (*VI* 135). "The look," in particular,

> envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them, it moves in

> its own way with its abrupt and imperious style, and yet the views taken are not desultory – I do not look at chaos but at things – so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command (133).

According to Merleau-Ponty, perception involves an uninterrupted convolution of being: the body is engaged in an inspection of the world while simultaneously folding back upon itself. To illustrate this mutual exchange, Merleau-Ponty utilizes the metaphor of two hands touching. The hand that touches is a mode of investigative and intentional operations; the hand that is touched is an assemblage of parts: skin, bones and cartilage. The activity of touching/being touched is a component of Being-in-the-world; it is a tangibility of perception that occurs when a passive activity — seeing, touching, hearing — crosses over with an active and intentional constitution of parts — the seen, the touched, the heard (Landes 226). This idea establishes a fundamental contradiction: the body as it exists in the world is two states of being that are impossible to minimize into an absolutely constituted whole. Therefore, it is through the perpetual act of touching the world with all of the senses that one is brought into a symbiotic communion with it. As Merleau-Ponty quotes from Cézanne, "'Nature is on the inside'"; therefore "quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them" ("Eye" 125). This underlying condition of reversibility elucidates the ambiguity of encountering, and being encountered by, the world — of being "embedded," as Woolf writes in "A Sketch of the Past," in so many "moments of non-being," where the reciprocity of embodiment is drawn into consciousness suddenly by moments of intense and profound estrangement from the norm (70).

Woolf's renderings of the environments that her characters inhabit in *The Years* reinforce the notion that seeing the world is, as Merleau-Ponty explains it, dependent upon an "infringement" between the "tangible and the visible" (VI 134): "to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated [. . .] so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another" (139). This construct of reversibility is displayed in the novel when characters are emotionally and psychologically captivated by the arrangement of everyday objects in a physical space, or by the effects of natural light, such as a sunrise or sunset. A recurring example of this phenomenon is when Woolf conflates the passage of time with the quality and movements of the moon: "At length the moon rose and its polished coin, though obscured now and then by wisps of cloud, shone out with serenity, with severity, or perhaps with

complete indifference. Slowly wheeling, like the rays of a searchlight, the days, the weeks, the years passed one after another across the sky" (*TY* 3-4). Throughout the opening section of the story, the characters' encounters with the rooms of Abbercorn Terrace entwine with the indefinable emotions that revolve around the event of Mrs. Pargiter's death. This interweaving of interior and exterior worlds is illustrated quite strikingly, for instance, when Delia is sitting by her mother's bed and attempting to reconcile a range of contradictory feelings as she watches her mother "existing in [a] borderland between life and death" (16). During this encounter, Delia grieves while becoming absorbed in a perceptual engagement with the room:

> A long narrow glass by the bedside reflected a section of the sky; it was dazzled at the moment with red light. The dressing table was illuminated. The light struck on silver bottles and on glass bottles all set out in the perfect order of things that are not used. At this hour of the evening the sick-room had an unreal cleanliness, quiet and order. There by the bedside was a little table set with spectacles, prayer-book and a vase of lilies of the valley. The flowers, too, looked unreal. There was nothing to do but to look. (16)

The dreamlike quality of the moment Delia has with her mother – wherein Mrs. Pargiter does "not look as if she were dying" – is stabilized by Delia's willingness to gaze intently at the qualities and configurations of the objects in her immediate vicinity (16). Delia is drawn into an acquiescence of the moment, which involves the reversibility between her perceiving body and the perceived elements of her environment. As a result, her inner thoughts are revealed, but not perspicuous. The scene is left unresolved, enabling recomposition of the aesthetic elements of the scene – the "glass" reflecting a "section of the sky" and the "bottles" arranged in "perfect order" – as though it were a still-life painting. The overall effect is of the latency of grief, with all of its inexpressible and contradictory emotions, vibrating beneath the surface of the gaze.

The comparison I make between the encounter the characters have with their worlds and the act of apprehending a painting is useful for understanding the theory of reversibility, and indeed, it is an analogy both Woolf and Merleau-Ponty utilize repeatedly in their careers. In "Eye and Mind," for example, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the "transubstantiation" that occurs in the act of painting, and that emerges in the body during the gaze, is one and the same: it is an "intertwining of vision and movement," and it "is by lending [one's] body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings" (123; 124). Likewise, Woolf explores in her works how the visual artist has unique access to an embodied condition of being. Naomi Toth and Laura

Doyle have recognized in *To the Lighthouse*, for instance, that through the process of visualizing and actualizing a painting, the character Lily Briscoe demonstrates through the process of visualizing and actualizing a painting how scenes from the past culminate in the present, and on multiple planes of perception: "Lily stepped back to get her canvas – so into perspective. [. . .] And as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there" (*TL* 163-64). Toth writes that Lily searches "for meaning within vision rather than beyond it" and that "[n]either being nor meaning, neither subject nor object can be conceived of outside of perception: they are grounded in and founded by the perceptive act" (342). I would add, however, that the philosophical ramifications of Lily's perceptive powers are not exclusively applicable to the artist characters featured in Woolf's works. In *The Years*, nearly all of the female characters, and to some extent the male characters as well, demonstrate a similar acuity of vision. Woolf's descriptions imply a level of receptivity on the part of the observers in her narrative, who at every turn entwine themselves with colour, form, depth, movement, contour, and line. These elements of perception are "branches of Being" and are expedient to creating meaning out of the dehumanizing events (death, war, social upheaval) that define the lives of the characters ("Eye" 148).

The Years is filled with instances in which the characters apprehend the seeming disorder and incomprehensibility of their world in the same way an artist might regard a scene for a painting, or a musician might hear the sounds for a musical composition. In the "1880" section, the character Delia frequently allows sensory stimuli (quick glances, background sounds, physical touches, and objects) to linger in her body, enabling a range of significations, and yet creating a unified image of her world. As her cousin James speaks at the podium during her mother's funeral service, Delia enters a perceptual reverie: she slips in and out of comprehending the words recited from a biblical text, which sound "like music" in one moment and move from the "known to the unknown" in the next (*TY* 62). During this episode, Delia becomes untethered from the socially constructed pageantry of death and is awakened for a moment to the specificities of her world as she watches her mother's casket being lowered into the earth:

> She stared down into the grave. There lay her mother; in that coffin – the woman she had loved and hated so. Her eyes dazzled. She was afraid that she might faint; but she must look; she must feel; it was the last chance that was left her. Earth dropped on the coffin; three pebbles fell on the hard shiny surface; and as they dropped she was possessed by a

> sense of something everlasting; of life mixing with death, of death becoming life. For as she looked she heard the sparrows chirp quicker and quicker; she heard wheels in the distance sound louder and louder; life came closer and closer. (63)

Delia feels an urgency to make emotional contact with her mother, and as the casket is covered by dirt, she actively engages all of her senses. In doing so, her immanence is intertwined with her sensory life. An image is composed that incorporates the incongruent and paradoxical elements (life and death, empathy and futility, attainment and loss) of the moment. Her sensorial engagement ignites a reversibility wherein the world seems to intensify in response – "sparrows chirp" faster and background sounds are drawn "closer" (63). Changes and fluctuations within her physical sphere are brought into union due to the indeterminacy of her grief and the earnestness of her gaze.

Throughout the novel, Woolf renders emotional states such as grief and longing as silent presences relegated to the private interchanges and interactions the characters have with their environments. It is in these spaces that the Pargiter women find personal latitude in the midst of authoritative and performative expressions of patriarchal order and decorum. At the same time, this "stability" can be, as Hoberman suggests, "alienating: its materiality casts it in opposition to their subjectivity" (81). This depiction of a rich, yet divergent, exchange between the material world and the consciousness, wherein physical objects and spaces are "embedded in the texture of everyday life," is seen again in the 1913 section when the character Eleanor returns to Abercorn Terrace before it is sold (92). As in all of the opening passages in the novel, Woolf begins with a description of a specific time and season. It is a technique that draws awareness to and emphasizes how the natural world encroaches upon and interacts with the interior, human-made spaces of the house: "The snow cast a hard white glare upon the walls of the bathroom, showed up the cracks on the enamel bath, and the stains on the wall" (157). The severe quality of the light reflected from the snow establishes a material connection with the physical world amidst displacement and loss. The cracks and stains are given attention in the scene because they exist in the empty spaces once occupied by familiar objects: "The white light of the snow glared in on the walls. It showed up the marks on the walls where the furniture had stood, where the pictures had hung. [. . .] There too were marks on the wall, where the bookcase had stood, where the writing-table had stood. She [Eleanor] thought of herself sitting there" (158). The light of the snow illuminates the physical zones of Abercorn Terrace that represent static intervals of time and that

encompass both presence and absence. Through her gaze, Eleanor absorbs the concretization of the marks and stains on the walls, and composes a version of herself interacting with the space as she would have done in the past, but conceived as though it is happening in the present. In this way, Eleanor enacts a form of embodied mimesis, what Merleau-Ponty calls "a 'visible' to the second power, a carnal essence or icon of the first" — a communication with the world wherein "[t]hings have an internal equivalent in me" ("Eye" 126). Merleau-Ponty stresses that this reproduction of being is not "a faded copy, a trompe l'oeil, or another thing," but a rendering of experience made palpable through the perceptive act (126). Woolf's descriptions of the objects under Eleanor's active gaze illustrate a way of inspecting and rendering everyday life in a manner that establishes connections between interior and exterior realities, and that enables a reflective investigation of Eleanor's represented and perceived world. Through the agency of the look, Eleanor occupies Abercorn Terrace with the ever-varying reversibility of the body, creating a tangibility of being that touches the past as it touches the present.

As Hoberman and Davis have both observed, Woolf's concentrated engagement with the perceptual world reveals the idiosyncrasies of individual experience amidst the ascendency of larger historical and social narratives that "move ahead with or without the knowledge of those who live through them" (Davis 19). Woolf's emphasis on the way in which the female characters in the novel document their lives through the gaze, and by looking at how everyday domestic objects connect moments through located memory and reflection, reveals how they operate according to a mode of Being-in-the-world that sets them apart from their male counterparts. Consistently, Woolf gives a great deal of attention to the estrangement women experience when they attempt to interact in spaces habituated by men — we might think of the narrator in *A Room of One's Own* who looks upon, but is barred access to, the privileged rooms of the British Library; or, the way in which the narrator in *Jacob's Room* imaginatively projects what the experience might have been for young men in Cambridge dormitories. In *The Years*, the women's encounters with their worlds are directed by their amplified perceptual acuity, which is largely a result of their alienation from conventionalized understandings of space. For example, in the "1891" chapter Woolf paints a discerning picture of the delimited spaces of the Law Courts of London through Eleanor's eyes: "In the pale top light all their faces looked parchment coloured; all their features seemed cut out. They had lit the gas. She gazed at the Judge himself. He was now lying back in his great carved chair under the Lion and the Unicorn, listening. He looked

infinitely sad and wise, as if words had been beating upon him for centuries" (81). Woolf portrays a space determined by the boundaries of patriarchal reasoning: The faces of the Judge and law officials are the colour of paper, and they are described as though their bodies have been etched into their environment. Eleanor absorbs the world of the Law Courts perceptually, but only to a degree: her "mind [wanders]," and she is compelled to move out into the street, where the "uproar, the confusion, the space of the Strand came upon her with a shock of relief" (81). Although Eleanor fulfills an extraneous role in the world of professionalization, she has the ability, unlike the judge in the Law Courts, to traverse spatial and psychological barriers largely because she has been conditioned by the interior strategies of the domestic world — an experiential and multi-faceted space that involves continual reciprocity with other phenomenal objects and bodies. In this way, Eleanor's outsider status points to the feminist vision that runs through Woolf's oeuvre — most overly, perhaps, in works such as *A Room of One's Own*, "Professions for Women," and *Three Guineas* — and enables a productive tension between domestic-trained visual/experiential strategies and the hegemonic norms of a male-dominated world. When Eleanor leaves the Law Courts, she allows her focus, and likewise her being, to diffuse through her environment and manifest the reversibility of her body:

> She felt herself expand. It was daylight here; a rush, a stir, a turmoil of variegated life came racing towards her. It was as if something had broken loose – in her, in the world. She seemed, after her concentration, to be dissipated, tossed about. She wandered along the Strand, looking with pleasure at the racing street; at the shops full of bright chains and leather cases; at the white-faced churches; at the irregular jagged roofs laced across and across with wires. Above was the dazzle of a watery but gleaming sky. The wind blew in her face. She breathed in a gulp of fresh wet air. And that man, she thought, thinking of the dark little Court and its cut-out faces, has to sit there all day, every day. (81)

This passage demonstrates the template by which Eleanor lives throughout the narrative. Her absorption of the urban environment through her bodily senses exemplifies the same movements as the street wanderers in *Mrs. Dalloway*: "This was her world; here she was in her element. The streets were crowded; women were swarming in and out of shops with their shopping baskets. There was something customary, rhythmical about it, she thought, like rooks swooping in a field, rising and falling" (69). Eleanor's perceptual intake of the world – "bright chains," "leather cases," "white-faced churches," "irregular jagged roofs" – infringes upon her body, which acts as

another object in the world (81). She experiences the world not as an unchanging and predetermined phenomenon but as a living organism with which she engages symbiotically.

Eleanor operates by a perceptual intuition that diffuses her focus but allows for movements through the determined spheres of perception to which the judges at the Law Courts are confined (36). It may be argued, then, that Eleanor's inability to focus is charged with gendered significance — that it results from a lack of "formal education" and her pervasive uncertainties about the "importance of her voice within a world of men" (Amidon 95). Indeed, due to the constrictions of Eleanor's social, political, and professional status, much of her formation is invisible and in a state of gestation: she appears to others, as well as to herself, to be "trapped within her subjectivity" (95). I would argue as well that Woolf's aesthetic approach to character positions Eleanor on a continuum of development; she is, as collage of elements perpetually taking shape, which is a construct I believe can be applied in varying degrees to both the male and female characters in the novel. Because Woolf invests a considerable amount of effort describing the worlds of her characters, she manages to give colour, form, and texture to their realities, thereby bringing to light the incongruences and contrasts as well as the similarities and parallels between men and women living within a patriarchal setting. In this way, Woolf evades presenting a clear dichotomy between qualities of maleness and femaleness and shows rather the degrees by which both men and women are governed by the qualities of their environments. A passage that elucidates is one in which the Character Edward is first introduced. Woolf describes the environment of academia as a sprawling area of dark masses and insubstantial zones where lamps serve as the only source of illumination: "Lamps were being lit here and there in the dark mass of the college; and there was a pale-yellowish mound in one corner where lamplight fell upon a flowering tree. The grass was becoming invisible, fluid, grey, like water" (35). The visual dimensions of the scene are striking, as Edward inhabits a world exclusively lit by the warm glow of oil lamps; it is a place confined and hedged in by the obscurity of a darkened environment. I would argue that this lamp-lit world mirrors and determines the kind of intellect Edward develops. The lamp by which he works mediates and reflects the nature of his intelligence:

> When the lamp was turned higher he saw his work cut out in a sharp circle of bright light from the surrounding dimness. [. . .] But as he read, his brain gradually warmed; he was conscious of something quickening and tightening in his forehead. He caught phrase after

> phrase exactly, firmly, more exactly, he noted, making a brief note in the margin, than the night before. Little negligible words now revealed shades of meaning which altered the meaning. [. . .] There it was, clean and entire. But he must be precise; exact; even his little scribbled notes must be clear as print. [. . .] He must let nothing dwindle off into vagueness. (36)

When Edward is near the lamp his intellectual perception is amplified, allowing him to be focused and "precise." In this mood, his movements of thought are determined and purposeful. He experiences a Cartesian cogito, in which his sense of being radiates out from a pre-formulated system: a classification of "shades of meaning" devised by the intellect (36).

Unlike Eleanor's mind, which is governed by an embodied reversibility that effuses her thoughts in accordance with her sensory milieu, Edward's intellect is enclosed and directed in this scene through the confines of abstract thought. However, there are moments when Edward is conscious of a phenomenological rhythm similar to that of Eleanor's. In his room at Oxford, Edward encounters a brief disruption to his exactitude of thought: "But for a moment it seemed to him that he was still running; his mind went on without the book. It travelled by itself without impediments through a world of pure meaning; but gradually it lost its meaning. The books stood out on the wall: he saw the cream coloured panels; a bunch of poppies in a blue vase" (37). Here, Edward begins to experience the world as Eleanor does. His mind travels beyond the confines of his books through what he perceives to be "a world of pure meaning." He is unable to attach intellectual significance to the objects in his gaze ("cream coloured panels," "bunch of poppies," "blue vase") and is for an instance perceptually transfixed by them in their materiality (37). Further on in the passage, he begins to drink wine, and another transition takes place. The inebriating effects of his drink transition him out of his sensory world and back into the subjective world of his imagination: "The wine seemed to press open little dividing doors in his brain. And whether it was the wine or the words or both, a luminous shell formed, a purple fume, from which out stepped a Greek girl; yet she was English. There she stood among the marble and the asphodel, yet there she was among the Morris wall-papers and the cabinets – his cousin Kitty" (37). Again, Edward experiences a blurring of two worlds: the physical details of his study and his fantasy of Kitty as the Greek heroine, Antigone. Ultimately, he finds the conflation of his senses and his mind irrational and intolerable. He finally shouts "Oh, damn!" and smashes his pencil point on his paper, as if to break the spell of his vision and allow the enclosed spheres of

his intellect to be reestablished (38).

The contrasts between Edward's and Eleanor's responses to their environments suggest the degree to which their surroundings likewise determine and mediate their conditions of being. Unlike Eleanor, whose movements through the chaotic stimuli of the Strand comes to her with a sense of relief, Edward experiences the world of the senses and the world of the abstract intellect as distinct spheres of being. As Merleau-Ponty explains, our perception of the world is not "delegated to a reading mind which deciphers the impacts of the light qua thing upon the brain and which could not do this as well if it had never inhabited a body. No longer is it a matter of speaking about space and light, but of making space and light, which are there, speak to us" ("Eye" 138). Eleanor has the ability to allow the variegations of her inner world to reflect and absorb the disruptions and transformations of her environment, resulting in an unfolding communion with the physical world. In a scene that is markedly similar to the setting the narrator describes in "The Mark on the Wall," Eleanor finds solace looking at the phenomena in her direct vicinity and listening to the evening sounds outside her window:

> The candle burnt its little pear-shaped flame on the table by her side. She lay listening vaguely to the trees in the garden; and watched the shadow of a moth that dashed round and round the room. [. . .] She wanted to lie still. It was a relief to lie in the semi-darkness after the talk, after the cards. She could still see the cards falling; black, red and yellow; kings, queens and knaves; on a green baize table. She looked drowsily round her. A nice vase of flowers stood on the dressing-table; there was the polished wardrobe and a china box by her bedside. (*TY* 155)

In this passage, Eleanor's reversibility, her bodily absorption of the colours and sounds of her world, establishes a reverberation of consciousness: her mind conveys the sensory details of past moments ("cards falling,"a "green baize table") and intermingles them with the objects directly under her gaze in the present. This state of being provides congruity and harmony, and at the same time, presents limitations. She is unable to focus with the same intensity and certainty as Edward does in the lamplit spaces of academia. When she attempts to read Dante's "archaic Italian," the full meaning of the text evades her: the words on the page "scratch the surface of her mind" as she watches the "moths on the ceiling" and listens to the "call of the owl as it looped from tree to tree with its liquid cry" (156). Just before she drifts off to sleep, she reflects upon the fugacity of existence: "the sense came to her of a ship padding softly through the waves; of a

train swinging from side to side down a railway-line. Things can't go on for ever, she thought. Things pass, things change, she thought, looking up at the ceiling. And where are we going? Where? Where? . . . The moths were dashing round the ceiling; the book slipped on to the floor. [. . .] Darkness reigned" (156). The disorientation Eleanor feels in this moment is made all the more palpable by her concentrated attention upon the sensory particularities of her world. Woolf's descriptions reinforce Merleau-Ponty's assertion that perception is a transitory phenomenon: "Vision is the meeting, as at a crossroads, of all the aspects of Being. [. . .] It is impossible to say that here nature ends and the human being or expression begins. It is, then, silent Being that itself comes to show forth its own meaning" ("Eye" 147). This trysting space of silence is one that encapsulates the suppression and liberation of expression. Eleanor's gaze is both expansive and limited in its scope: her lack of formal education prevents her from absorbing the cultural implications of "archaic" symbols; yet, her perceptual acumen manifests a world pregnant with emotion, form, and colour swirling in a mass of significations.

The phenomenological underpinning of Woolf's writing grounds her descriptions of alternate forms of seeing and interacting with the world, and her exploration of the transformative aspects of being that rarely show themselves in extroversive forms. I would argue that Eleanor's inner-directed mode of being, which enables her to be transformed by the world, is reflected to varying degrees in all of the important characters in the novel. Woolf's description of Martin's movements through the city in the "1914" section is an intriguing example. In these passages, Martin is manifesting an oscillation between Cartesian ontology and phenomenological perception. As he takes in the rush of city stimuli through his senses, his perceiving eye becomes the centre by which a pre-established unity of order and design is realized: "All the weights in his body seemed to shift. He had a curious sense of something moving in his body in harmony with the building; it righted itself: it came to a full stop. It was exciting – this change of proportion. He wished he had been an architect" (166). The bodily shift he feels in direct relation to the architecture around him is an exciting moment of reversibility. However, this upheaval is only in retrospect to the "full stop" that comes after when his body becomes a correlate entity to the unchanging and proportional structure of St. Paul's Cathedral (166). His wish to have "been an architect" reveals that his experience of the world is governed by a predetermined ideal of design and proportion, which is much in line with Roger Fry's formalism. This view is expressed a number of times throughout the "1914" section. When Martin is in Hyde Park with Sally, Woolf

writes: “The urbanity of the Park, the gleam of the water, the sweep and curve and composition of the scene, as if someone had designed it, affected Martin agreeably” (176). He also observes repeatedly his visual impressions of Maggie and Sally, who are “dappled with lozenges of floating light,” as though he were viewing paintings in a gallery. His sensations and movements through the “urbanity” of Hyde Park are directed by a guiding paradigm of aesthetic values and judgments. In this way, his experience in the park is a kind of romanticized visualization, rather than a perceptual actualization.

There are moments, however, when Martin has the ability to transition through different states of perception. A little further on in the passage, Martin experiences a transition, much like Edward does in the “1880” section, into a phenomenological mode of experiencing his environment. It is significant to note that this perceptual shift is triggered by a question that challenges the Cartesian certainty of self — “What would the world be [. . .] without ‘I’ in it?” (177) — and by the action of lighting a match, which for Martin seems to signify the visualization of his individuality: “He lit the match. He looked at the flame that had become almost invisible in the sun. [. . .] The sun dappling the leaves gave everything a curious look of insubstantiality as if it were broken into separate points of light. He too, himself, seemed dispersed. His mind for a moment was blank. Then he roused himself, threw away his match, and caught up Sally” (177). It is uncertain how conscious Martin is of his momentary slippage into actualization of his question, but it is enough to awaken himself back into his world of ideal design. Later, when he catches up with Sally, Martin observes that “[life] had resumed its ordinary proportions. Everything once more was back in its place. The boats were sailing; the men walking; the little boys dabbled in the pond for minnows; the waters of the pond rippled bright blue. Everything was full of the stir, the potency, the fecundity of spring” (179). By the end of this section, Martin’s brief phenomenological moment has come to a standstill. Like Edward, he seems unable to exist in a state that defies the aesthetic order of the world he values; he cannot fully move beyond the barriers of a romanticized ideal of beauty and design.

The critique implicit in Woolf’s descriptions of Martin’s perceptual understanding of the world suggests a theoretical framework that diverges from the aesthetics and philosophy espoused by Roger Fry. As I have discussed in previous chapters, Fry promoted the idea that our engagement with beauty in art and in the everyday should be at its core unfettered by sentimental or non-visual cues and associations. Hoberman observes that “central to Fry’s notion of good art,

is its involvement in aesthetic as opposed to 'social' emotions and 'literary' associations" (84). However, she argues that in *The Years*, Woolf presses against Fry's formalism: "Objects in *The Years* are insistently embedded in the texture of everyday life; they also recur, providing assurance through their familiarity and endurance over time [. . .] that invites us to read them dialectically — critically as well as sympathetically, for their contradictions as well as for their sentimental value" (92). Eleanor's active participation in a personal and anomalous world of perception, wherein the cracks and stains of Abercorn Terrace, for instance, are clear emotional and psychological signifiers, reveals Woolf's endorsement of the individual and the latency of reminiscence embedded within the body and in the objects of the everyday. This phenomenological model is exemplified manifestly by the female characters in the novel, whereas the male characters would seem to adhere, for the most part, to strictly formal and pre-established paradigms of thought. In many instances, this adherence is unconscious: for instance, in the passage where Edward slips into a reverie in his study he notices for a brief instance the William Morris wallpaper on the walls. Morris' Pre-Raphaelite designs[3] were still considered a staple for good taste among the British elite in the early twentieth century, which suggests that Edward's engagement with the perceptual world is governed primarily by the aesthetic trappings of his cultural milieu. Woolf's inclusion of such an array of societal signifiers intermixed with descriptions of individual responses to the world supports Davis' assertion: "[W]hat this novel tells us is that nothing is extraneous. All signs, regardless of how minor they are to the characters or how quickly they are passed over in the narrative, all have something to tell us" (19). In other words, readers are brought into the ever-varying spectacle of the characters' immediate objects and surroundings, not so that they might appreciate the formalist ideals of an aesthetic movement, but so that they witness vivid documentation of the unpredictable and irresolvable emotions attached to existing at a distinctive time and place in recorded history.

Although Woolf's aesthetics in *The Years* deviate from Fry's formalism, they are no less clear in their direction and focus. Amidon suggests that Woolf's "purpose seems to be something novelists rarely attempt —theory building [. . .] an attempt at bringing together aesthetics (art) and ontology (lived existence), a task akin to the attempts of physicists to build a unified field of

[3] See Patrick Brantlinger's "Household Taste: Industrial Art, Consumerism, and Pre-Rapaelitism."

theory — not the work of a typical novel" (98). Woolf's methods enable her to depict the transformative aspects of character without relying on carefully formalized plot structures. She maintains her focus upon the immediate world of her characters, whose lives mirror and reciprocate the qualities of their surroundings. The character Kitty develops over the course of the narrative in a remarkably dramatic way; and yet, like all the characters in the novel, she is defined by the kind of sensory spaces she inhabits and by the way she moves between the boundaries of these spaces: either demarcating them or allowing them to blend into a unifying whole. Her transformation into Lady Lasswade happens in the gaps between the sections. Unlike Eleanor, she effectively moves through distinct spheres of influence and identity and manages to exist quite comfortably in an ordered world of public roles and societal distinctions so long as such movement remains available to her. In the "1910" section, for example, Woolf describes scenes in which Kitty observes the changing properties of artificial lights in the urban setting: "There was the Serpentine, red in the setting sun; the trees grouped together, sculptured, losing their detail; and the ghostly architecture of the little bridge, white at the end, composed the scene. The lights – the sunlight and the artificial light – were strangely mixed" (95). In other instances, Woolf draws attention to the interaction between the lights of the opera house and the jewellery worn by the women in the audience: "The house was filling up. Lights winked on ladies' arms as they turned; ripples of light flashed, stopped, and then flashed the opposite way as they turned their heads" (135). There are passages where the materiality of the scenes perceived through limited third-person narration suggest Kitty occupies the privileged spheres of upper-class influence. She observes people walking out in "their button-holes and their white waistcoats, in the glare of the afternoon sun. The ladies tripped uncomfortably on their high-heeled shoes; now and then they put their hands to their heads. The gentlemen kept close beside them as though protecting them. It's absurd, Kitty thought; it's ridiculous to come out in full evening dress at this time of day" (133). When the night arrives, and the lamps are glowing, "[she] felt at once a sense of relief . . . she no longer felt absurd. On the contrary, she felt appropriate. The ladies and gentlemen who were mounting the stairs were dressed exactly as she was" (133). Throughout this section, Woolf exhibits the intersections and stratifications of artificial and natural lights within the city environment to portray the entanglement and complexity of Kitty's positioning within her social cosmos. Like Edward, she at times finds solace in the warm and controlled rays of lamplight, which remind her that she is a part of an exclusive societal rank; in other moments, she

observes how the dispersive qualities of the sun exposes the incongruities and superficialities of upper-class decorum.

At the end of the "1914" section Kitty embarks on a train ride that extricates her from the radiant spectacle of city life into the diffused and untamed experience of the country. When her chauffeur drives her to the train station, and she moves through the electrically illuminated spaces of her Lasswade existence, she experiences the city as a blend of day and night: "Although it was close on midnight, it scarcely seemed to be night; but rather some ethereal disembodied day, for there were so many lamps in the streets; cars passing; men in white mufflers . . . and many houses were still lit up, for everyone was giving parties" (196). Kitty travels through a borderland between two distinct spheres of experience, and when she embarks on the train, she watches out her window from her brightly lit compartment: "Elongated lights slid past; lights in factories and warehouses; lights in obscure back streets . . . They were leaving London behind them; leaving that blaze of light which seemed, as the train rushed into the darkness, to contract itself into one fiery circle. The train rushed with a roar through a tunnel. It seemed to perform an act of amputation; now she was cut off from that circle of light" (197-198). The image of the train boring through the distinct spheres of city life and out into the dissolution of the country signifies a distinctly phenomenological rendering of movement through space and time. Unlike Edward and Martin, Kitty is, for the most part, conscious and accepting of her perceptual shifts. She does not experience them as decentering intellectual experiences but as passages across temporal and spatial barriers that involve the reversibility of her body. And, when Kitty walks into the open spaces of the country she experiences her environment as "[u]ncultivated, uninhabited, existing by itself, for itself [. . .]. Dark wedges of shadow, bright breadths of light lay side by side. Then, as she watched, light moved and dark moved; light and shadow went traveling over the hills and over the valleys" (203). Kitty's contentment in this environment suggests that she acknowledges her condition of reversibility: her internal state is a reflection of what her perceiving self is absorbing, rather than a result of a "pure intellect" attempting to give definite form to an idealized pattern of being (*WP* 69-70).

It is useful to compare Kitty's encounter with the natural world to Eleanor's experience while visiting Celia in the country in the "1913" section. Eleanor considers how the landscape of the downs reveals its beauty when the twilight blurs the edges between night and day: "now that the sun had sunk and the trees were massed together without separate leaves it [the downs] had its

beauty, Eleanor thought. The downs were becoming larger and simpler; they were becoming part of the sky" (151). For Eleanor, the horizon itself is imperceptible under the ever-changing effects of natural light.

> They sat in a semicircle looking across the meadows at the fading hills. The broad bar of green that lay across the horizon had vanished. Only a tinge was left in the sky. It had become peaceful and cool; in them too something seemed to be smoothed out. There was no need to talk. The owl flew down the meadow again; they could just see the white of its wing against the dark of the hedge. (152)

The communion the sisters experience, both with each other and with the natural world, is mediated by their shared gaze. This perceptual exchange is at the heart of Woolf's aesthetic philosophy. The occasion of watching the sun transform the downs ignites a reciprocal phenomenon internally. They begin to communicate through a series of bodily exchanges between the actual and the imaginary, and embrace the silence of the moment. Indeed, the descriptions Woolf provides of her characters' encounters with the natural world are perhaps the most illustrative of her phenomenological methodology as a writer. They exemplify Merleau-Ponty's assertion that there is an innate communion between our "vision" and the "visible" — it is "an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand" (*VI* 130). Woolf's description of the women's impression of the light on the hills uncovers the equivocal and fugitive aspects of living in the world, while at the same time showcases Woolf's ability to represent the verisimilitude of being that is intrinsically aligned with the reversibility of the body.

As the scene on the downs demonstrates, Woolf's aesthetic theory is based upon the fundamental ambiguity of human perception. For this reason, I am often reticent to attach a framework too firmly to Woolf's writing methods. Nonetheless, I do propose that in *The Years*, Woolf models through her characters a spectrum of philosophical states of being. Characters such as Edward and Eleanor appear to exist at very different points of this continuum. Some members of the Pargiter family settle immovably in one place while others pass through their variegated spaces of being in dramatic ways, either unconsciously sliding back and forth between extremes, as Martin does, or, like Kitty, making deliberate and conscious movements across boundaries of existence. For Martin and Edward, the world is ideally comprised of elements that work together to form a unifying truth. This is why throughout the novel, the Pargiter men fail to move across temporal spaces to the same degree as Eleanor, Kitty, or Delia. When they encounter a shift in

their perception, they seem to become fixated upon the flaws of the new perspective; the paths they follow along are purposeful and delineated by the clear-cut parameters of their professional worlds. The women, on the other hand, are able to "get the feel of a world [. . .] in which regions of space are separated by the time it takes to move our gaze from one to the other, a world in which being is not given but rather emerges over time" (*WP* 54). For this reason, I assert that Woolf presents through the women characters an alternative paradigm for living in the world. They imbue and project the materiality of their surroundings in order to reclaim the peculiarities of the self Being-in-the-world.

I will conclude with a reflection Eleanor has in the "Present Day" section, during a gathering representing three generations of the Pargiter family: "Does everything then come over again a little differently? She thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? . . . a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought gave her extreme pleasure: that there was a pattern. But who makes it? Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought" (271). This consideration affirms the model by which Eleanor has lived her entire life and echoes what Woolf herself articulates in "A Sketch of the Past": "At times I can go back to St. Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. . . Now, if this is so, is it not possible – I often wonder – that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence?" (67). Woolf is conveying in her memoir, and through the character of Eleanor, that our lives are made up of moments of perception surrounded by a field of horizons. Eleanor is built up by a network of impressions and associations envisaged through the reversibility of her body:

> Atoms danced apart and massed themselves. But how did they compose what people called life? She clenched her hands and felt the hard little coins she was holding. Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre; and again she saw herself sitting at her table drawing on the blotting-paper, digging little holes from which spokes radiated. Out and out they went; thing followed thing, scene obliterated scene. (268-269)

Eleanor's development is the "sedimentation" of life, a "zone of generalized existence and of already completed projects, significations scattered between us and things" (*PhP* 476). This is why her experiences are not, cannot be apprehended all at once: they take shape through the gradual unfolding of "millions of things" circling back to her present awareness; they are as

Merleau-Ponty phrases it, "a synthesis that was in the making" (*PhP* 400). Because this fusion of being unfolds on the level of an embodied engagement with the world, it is, as Woolf would have it, never fully known.

CONCLUSION

The "central line down the middle" of my project is an examination of Woolf's artistic framework for understanding and representing the obscurity of being (*L3* 385). In utilizing the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty — whose purpose was to awaken the intellectual realm to the inconclusiveness of science and to elucidate what it is to encounter the world at the indistinguishable horizon between thought and sense — I remain fascinated by how Woolf shaped, through a life-long absorption and reinterpretation of Bloomsbury aesthetics, a method for representing the world that embraces the interlacing rhythm of thought and perception. Eleanor's realization at the end of The Years — in which she sees herself as a "knot" at the core of her existence while at the same time a "mass of atoms" forever expanding outward (269) — exemplifies Woolf's aesthetic philosophy, and echoes her declaration in "A Sketch to the Past that "the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art" (72). On the one hand, this assertion suggests a comforting universality; on the other hand, it presents innumerable uncertainties and deviations from a connecting pattern. Indeed, Woolf was repeatedly engaged in the challenging attempt to articulate lived reality in a fictional prose work. Emerging from that endeavour, her works suggest that the more one attempts to retrieve and formulate meaning from life, the more one encounters an irresolvable riddle and returns to the "black space" under the nursery table ("Sketch" 78). Woolf's belief that a writer must know that an unseen pattern exists is thus coexistence with the state of being content with her inability to fully explain it; that the "cotton wool" — the habituated inconsequentialness of the everyday — is integral for communicating as vividly and truthfully as possible the panoptic situation of our lives, for offering the reader a looking glass with multiple lenses that peer simultaneously at the subjective self and the objective world (72).

As indicated by the reflections of the speaker of *Three Guineas* and, earlier, the narrator in *A Room of One's Own*, who offers to the reader alternatives to interwar British patriarchal structures of language, education, and gender, Woolf champions the outsider who wants leverage to commune with as well as challenge the intellectual and physical privileges enjoyed by the ruling class. The speaker in the latter text describes the material obstacles in the way of creative pursuits by women — a history of poverty, a lack of proper patronage — which establish a deeply-embedded cultural paradigm of oppression. In reaction to these realities, the speaker

engages in a creative act that recasts her submerged feelings into a drawing, a grotesque caricature of Professor von X: "But while I pondered, I had unconsciously, in my listlessness, in my desperation, been drawing a picture" (28). In her "idleness," the narrator unearths a "submerged truth" (28): she realizes she has made the sketch in anger, an emotion she calls "the black snake," which has the potential to pigeonhole and cloud a person's creative vision (29). Throughout her career, Woolf often felt at a loss to know how to express the plight of the outsider without exposing the "black snake" (29). This project contends that, as a strategy, she embraces time and again through her writing a return to the body and to the sensory world, which Lily Briscoe's painting excursion in the last section of *To the Lighthouse* illustrates. Each moment Lily applies her brush to her canvas, she evokes a kind of heightened consciousness that both encapsulates and releases the experience of a moment: "One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, it's a miracle, it's an ecstasy" (164). Likewise, characters such as Jacob Flanders, Clarissa Dalloway, and Eleanor Pargiter demonstrate through the art of living in the world the need to tunnel through the psychological strata of the everyday, and to "[question] the universe," as does the speaker in response to the tailless Manx cat on the lawn at Oxbridge. The result is a reordering of the world that heightens some levels of awareness and diffuses others: a perceptual embodiment that enables movement through the oppressive classifications of identity to arrive at a pivoting vantage point in the middle of a sea of reimagined scenes.

This impetus to write the world as one sees it without the obscuring effects of extreme emotion is what enabled Woolf to represent the complexities of lived experience in a way that few other novelists had achieved up to that point. It is an impulse Woolf returns to in "On Being Ill," where she claims that the "incomprehensibility" involved in our limitations and indeterminable nature of being has "an enormous power over us" (21). However, "if at last we grasp the meaning, it is all the richer for having come to us sensually first, by way of the palate and the nostrils, like some queer odour. (21-22) The characters in Woolf's prose invite readers to look through their eyes as they reflect on their materialistic situations — in both the socio-economic and existential meanings of the term — while wandering the familiar rooms, corridors, and streets of their physical realities. Their instinct is to construct the world through their senses, to build "an enormous nest," as Gaston Bachelard calls it: "an agglomerate of earth and sky, of

death and life" (124). Put in other words, the characters and voices within Woolf's prose don the sensibilities of an artist archetype, who often performs an inconsequential role in the social order. Time and again, Woolf positions this outsider figure within a living and breathing system of perceiving, and legitimizes the alternative and indeterminate energies of a creative mind responding in the world.

As other scholars before me have argued, Woolf's prose evades the hegemonic structures of conventional narrative styles, and thereby challenges a "consensual" approach to realism according to the "dissensual" and diffuse nature of lived experience (Morrris 21). And yet this politically-charged writing technique expresses a longing for embeddedness in the world. Woolf's characters reach out to their material surroundings to preserve a sense of belonging and connectivity with the people and things that constitute them. Jacob Flanders, for instance, is representative of a generation of young men set adrift and ultimately brutalized by an empire set on maintaining its patriarchal and nationalistic ideologies in the face of global and societal turmoil. Woolf writes Jacob's body into the folds and corners of his physical world, in part to assuage and memorialize her own grief for the loss of her brother, Thoby Stephen, but also to situate the reader in a "vibratory" landscape of sky, grass, boats, books, smoke, and dormitory rooms (Bennett 5). The materiality of Jacob's world reflects the work of new materialist philosophers, such as Jane Bennett. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Bennett describes an encounter with a pile of refuse in a back alley lot:

> Glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick. As I encountered these items, they shimmered back and forth between debris and thing — between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore [. . .], and, on the other hand, stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects. In the second moment, stuff exhibited its thing-power: it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying. (4)

Similar to Bennett's evocation of the world of things as "vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics" (5), Woolf's call through her fiction is for a greater recognition of the regenerative and transformative processes of the physical world. Clarissa Dalloway's streets, clocks, flowers, motor cars, and aeroplanes, and Eleanor's skies, snow, candles, and cracks on the wall are reminders of how

things revitalize our Being-in-the-world, where we ourselves are things of this world, a conglomeration of cells, a "swarming activity" of particles (Bennett 10).

In its urge to reckon with materiality outside the bounds of consciousness, new materialism diverges from the phenomenological focus in my study; nonetheless, I suggest it offers rewarding possibilities for future Woolf scholarship. Leanna Lostoski-Ho, for instance, has applied Bennett's theories in readings of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, to argue for the "role and the agency of the nonhuman as well as the human in shaping the world" (54). As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost explain, new materialists, such as Rosi Braidotti, Karan Barad, and Quentin Meillassoux, are addressing "the emergence of pressing ethical and political concerns that accompany the scientific and technological advances predicated on new scientific models of matter," and exploring the "significance of complex issues such as climate change or global capital and population flows, the bio technological engineering of genetically modified organisms, or the saturation of our intimate and physical lives by digital, wireless, and virtual technologies" (5). While I write these words, we as a human species are experiencing a global pandemic. We are in a stance, the likes of which most of us have never experienced in our lifetimes, to seriously consider our attitude towards Being-in-the-world. As we grapple with the challenge of maintaining a sense of collective attachment via digital technology — live video conferencing, social media, and streaming entertainment — we are at the same time tasked to find our individual methods and modes for experiencing embeddedness in the world. In light of our current situation, Woolf's writing is especially prescient: it has taught me the importance of paying attention to the details of our lived environments, even in their seeming irrelevance. Her ongoing lesson is that we are always somewhat adrift regardless of the relative social, political, and ecological stability of our world. She suggests that whenever we are indisposed, either physically or mentally, from the expected patterns and behaviours of our social spheres, we "float with the sticks on the stream; helter-skelter with the dead leaves on the lawn, irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time for years, to look round, to look up — to look, for example, at the sky" ("Being" 12). When we are compelled to pay attention to our physical surroundings, we find that reality "is a little shocking" (13). In describing that sky, for instance, Woolf writes:

> This then has been going on all the time without our knowing it! — this incessant making up of shapes and casting them down, this buffeting of clouds together, [. . .] this incessant

> ringing up and down of curtains of light and shade, this interminable experiment with gold shafts and blue shadows, with veiling the sun and unveiling it, with making rock ramparts and wafting them away — this endless activity, with the waste of Heaven knows how many million horse power of energy, has been left to work its will year in year out. (13-14)

In the midst of an unsettling period in our history, when it is mandated on a social and governmental level to stay home and curtail human interaction, I have felt more inclined to look at the sky, to walk the streets, and to consider Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "all of the rich dimensions of human experience begin from the fact that "the body is a natural power of expression" (*PhP* 187). My thirty-minute jog to work and back has turned into a forty-five-minute saunter, and I have become all the more aware of Woolf's Wandersmänner. I have begun to build a repertoire of surroundings in my body, to construct my "nest," in Bachelard's sense of the term (124). If I look in one direction, I am confronted by a universe of sensory phenomena: buildings that appear as patterns of squares and rectangles stacked upon one another in a receding procession; configurations of elm tree branches intertwined in myriad spirals and contortions against the pale light of a winter sky. When I tilt my head, the world shifts, and my body adjusts to the textures and surfaces of the sidewalk pavement at my feet, moving from soft white patches to gritty purple-greys and browns. Reading Woolf's prose has helped me to realize that intimacy with my world is one that unfolds over multiple and, at times, contradictory instances and involves a continuous sensory engagement with the specificity of objects.

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